

MATTA EL-MESKEEN:
A MODEL FROM THE EGYPTIAN DESERT FOR AUTHENTIC PASTORAL
LEADERSHIP IN THE CONTEMPORARY PENTECOSTAL CHURCH

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PREFACE

A crisis and a crossroads is where I found myself in 2012 after realizing the project I had founded and directed in Gaza for nearly ten years had outgrown my ability to lead effectively. I was facing my own leadership crisis and it was clear something had to change or the continuation of the ministry was in jeopardy. I was fortunate at the time for the opportunity to begin this program at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Christian Leadership. Around the same time I was given a small booklet by a friend in Egypt entitled *Spiritual Economy* written by a Coptic monk named Matta El-Meskeen. Little did I know at the time that these two events were providential and would lead to the eventual solution to my own leadership dilemma. What I needed for effective ministry was both academic (skill-based) and spiritual (character-based). GCTS and Matta El-Meskeen provided both.

As a Christian minister working on the foreign field for nearly twenty years, I have depended on and benefited from God's gracious provision through the generous and faithful giving of the local church. The strength of the local church depends on the leadership of godly men and women who have dedicated their lives to pastoral ministry and caring for God's people. Pastoral ministry in the local church has become increasingly more difficult and challenging over the last twenty years with the tremendous cultural changes occurring in our world today. Surveys and studies have highlighted these realities and their effect on a majority of pastors who struggle with discouragement, loneliness and feelings of inadequacy and unpreparedness. Many are leaving the ministry and many others are suffering silently. Missionaries are often introduced by pastors in the Assemblies of God as heroes, as if the work on the foreign

field is somehow more courageous, exciting, and beneficial to the kingdom than ministry in the local community. To this foreign worker, however, the pastors of the local church who face the current challenges and difficulties and remain faithful to their calling, who serve sacrificially and oftentimes unnoticed are the true heroes. It is to these men and women that I dedicate this work with the hope and prayer, that in some small way, it might be of benefit and encouragement to those, who like me, are facing their own crisis of leadership.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It has been a rich experience and a great benefit getting to know the monastic communities in Egypt and learning about their rich history and deep spirituality. The help I received from friends in Egypt who introduced me to monks at St. Macarius Monastery made this journey possible. Ramez Atallah at the Egyptian Bible Society and Dr. Hani Hanna at the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo were a great encouragement and help making contacts and arranging visits. Abuna Wadeed, Abuna Mercurius, Abuna Bertie, along with many others at St. Macarius, demonstrated true Christian fellowship and hospitality upon each visit. Conversations with the monks were always a highlight of each visit as they willingly offered their time and shared their stories and experiences. I am indebted to Rev. Hanna Maher, pastor of the Evangelical Church in Gaza, for introducing me to the writings of Abuna Matta El-Meskeen. The work of Brent Knipper translating the biography of Matta El-Meskeen from Arabic to English was a tremendous help and benefit. Dr. Steve Klipowicz provided much encouragement along with direction and advice throughout the writing process and suggested using Authentic Leadership Theory as a lens for studying the life of Matta El-Meskeen. The in-depth and anointed teaching of Dr. Tim Laniak throughout the residencies at Gordon-Conwell in Charlotte were inspirational, informative and helped guide this study to emphasize the shepherd metaphor in Christian ministry and understanding of biblical leadership. Finally, for the encouragement, support and love of my wife and family, I am forever grateful.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the life and leadership of Matta El-Meskeen, or Matthew the Poor, a Coptic monk and spiritual father who led St. Macarius Monastery in Wadi El-Natrun, Egypt through a period of significant revival. His leadership and scholarship resulted in significant renewal and growth within the Coptic Orthodox Church and the many monastic communities in Egypt. The life of Matta El-Meskeen is presented as a model of leadership for the contemporary Pentecostal Church using the Authentic Leadership Theory as a lens to interpret his effectiveness in ministry. Spiritual insight, or “discernment,” is highlighted and emphasized as a crucial aspect and quality for the Christian leader. The ancient paths of the desert fathers and their asceticism and practice of spiritual disciplines, specifically silence, solitude and prayer, are followed by Matta and his disciples and presented as the means for attaining spiritual discernment.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

I. The Assemblies of God and Pentecostal Leadership

With all the emphasis today on leadership study and development and with all the research that has been done in the past seventy years producing such a wide variety of different theories and models, why does the consensus seem to be there is a “crisis in leadership” or a “leadership vacuum” in our world today?¹ There is certainly no shortage of books on this subject and leadership organizations abound to identify, train, and develop potential leaders. Colleges and universities have developed degree programs for leadership studies and countless theses have been researched and written to examine leadership from nearly every angle. Corporations and businesses, educators and school administrators, religious denominations and non-profit organizations, and government agencies at all levels are spending billions of dollars each year on experts and consultants to provide leadership training and development. This crisis apparently is not unique to a certain segment of society or to a particular geographical location and is not confined to just the public or private sector.²

¹ A recent report from the World Economic Forum noted that “a startling 86 percent of respondents to the Survey on the Global Agenda agree that we have a leadership crisis in the world today.” Shiza Shahid, “Lack of Leadership,” *Outlook on the Global Agenda 2015*, accessed September 17, 2016, <http://reports.weforum.org/outlook-global-agenda-2015/top-10-trends-of-2015/3-lack-of-leadership/>. Kouzes and Posner elaborate: “Substantial numbers of people believe that leaders lack the capability to guide business and governmental institutions to greatness in this intensely and turbulent and competitive global marketplace. There is the gnawing sense in many corridors that leaders are not competent to handle the tough challenges; that they are not telling the truth; and that they are motivated more by greed and self-interest.” James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *Credibility: How Leaders Gain and Lose It, Why People Demand It* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011), xiii.

² John P. Kotter, *John P. Kotter on What Leaders Really Do* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 1999), 1-2. “After conducting fourteen formal studies and more than a thousand interviews, directly

A lack of leadership isn't just a problem in the United States; it's a global problem. It's also much more than an indictment on global politics; it's a systemic problem that pervades every level of society. I don't think there's much debate the world is ensnared in a crisis of leadership. The question becomes what do we do about it? Every so often a time arrives where society reaches a crossroads—where the situation and/or circumstance so obviously demands change that a populist mandate—a “movement” takes place ... I would submit we find ourselves at a very similar crossroads today.³

The Assemblies of God centennial celebration held in Springfield, Missouri, in August 2014 highlighted the dramatic growth of this Pentecostal denomination since its founding in 1914. Three hundred ministers in Hot Springs, Arkansas, came together in the early part of the twentieth century to form a “cooperative fellowship” and committed themselves to “the greatest evangelism the world has ever known.”⁴ Today the Assemblies of God numbers 68.5 million adherents worldwide in over 190 countries. The baptism in the Holy Spirit and the subsequent empowerment for service provided the theological impetus for a great missionary movement that has crossed the globe, preaching the gospel and planting churches on every continent. Unlike the growing trend in the United States where mainline churches and denominations are in decline, the

observing dozens of executives in action, and compiling innumerable surveys, I am completely convinced that most organisations today lack the leadership they need. I am not talking about a deficit of 10 percent, but of 200 percent, 400 percent, or more in positions up and down the hierarchy. This is not to say that untalented, unenergetic people occupy management positions. The typical case is just the opposite, with bright, experienced, and hardworking individuals, some quite extraordinary, almost all trying to do what they believe is right. The problem is that far too few of these people are providing the leadership that is increasingly needed in business, government, everywhere. ... The central issue here is not one of style...it is about core behavior on the job, not surface detail and tactics, a core that changes little over time, across different cultures, or in different industries.”

³ Mike Myatt, “A Crisis in Leadership,” *Forbes*, October 10, 2013, accessed October 7, 2016, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/mikemyatt/2013/10/10/a-crisis-of-leadership-whats-next/#2715e4857a0b537e19d348c4>.

⁴ Gary B. McGee and Darrin J. Rogers, “The Assemblies of God: Our Heritage in Perspective,” *Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center*, accessed September 17, 2016, <https://ifphc.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=history.main>.

Assemblies of God continues to grow in the US and around the world. Statistics show growth in the US at a slightly higher percentage rate than the population growth. More encouraging are the greater numbers of millennials attending Assembly of God churches and the growing racial and ethnic diversity of Assembly of God congregations.

Over the past one hundred years the Assemblies of God has never lacked for leadership, whether in pastoral ministry, foreign missions, or in the various ministries and offices of the district and General Councils. Pentecostal leaders, called of God and empowered by the Spirit, have remained true to their vocation and have held firmly to core values and beliefs. The paths that these Pentecostal forefathers and mothers traveled have been rediscovered and followed with each succeeding generation, yet current statistics and trends indicate that the movement may be coming to a crossroads.⁵ Statistics from local churches in the US are indicating a gradual drift from founding principles and core values and a decline in Spirit baptism, conversion and participation in foreign

⁵ Margaret Poloma wrote *The Assemblies of God at the Crossroads* in 1989 and highlighted the disparity between Pentecostal doctrine and personal and congregational experience. Margaret Poloma, "Charisma and Structure in the Assemblies of God," in *Church, Identity and Change*, ed. David Roozen and James Nieman (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 60, 62–63. "In an attempt to minimize the dangers of both disorder and inauthenticity, some pastors are placing less emphasis on experiences in their services. Opting for set programs, well-timed services, and a high level of professionalism, these pastors are often openly critical of 'emotionalism' in services. The dilemma is further jeopardized by the fact that some very successful Assemblies of God congregations have exchanged charisma for institutional techniques to promote church growth." "Revivals, once common in the AG, have gradually taken a backseat in many sectors of the denomination to seeker-sensitive churches and well-promoted programs ... they increasingly have been replaced by other rituals in many AG churches ... as fewer pastors and their congregants experience the range of charisma found in early Pentecostalism."

missions.⁶ The baptism in the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in other tongues has become less and less a personal experience by members in the local church.⁷

Causing concern are data disclosing a significant number of church members claiming to believe the doctrine but also reporting never to have spoken in tongues. It is evident that there is enough uneasiness over the uncertainty with which some pastors hold this doctrine that the national leadership is struggling for better ways to support the traditional position.⁸

In addition, “a significant number of adherents in local churches accept the doctrine of Spirit baptism but have not made the effort earnestly to seek the experience. The leadership of the denomination is addressing this matter as a sobering challenge for the future of the fellowship.”⁹ Finally, statistics show the median age of ministers in the Assemblies of God has increased from forty-five in 1986 to fifty-five today. This trend is particularly alarming as it points to a decreasing number of younger ministers replenishing the ranks.

James Bradford, the General Secretary of the Assemblies of God, highlighted three aspects of Pentecostal leadership from Luke 6:12–19 in an article titled “Believing God for Jesus-Style Leaders”: Pentecostal leadership is spiritual, relational and missional.

⁶ Assemblies of God, “2015 Full Statistical Report,” January 22, 2017, <https://ag.org/About/Statistics>. On a local level in the North Carolina District, nearly half of Assembly of God churches made no contribution to foreign missions in 2015, only forty-one percent had at least one foreign missions speaker visit in 2014 and a growing number of adherents have not experienced the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Fellowship among ministers on a district level has been in decline.

⁷ William Menzies, “The Challenges of Organization and Spirit in the Implementation of Theology in the Assemblies of God,” in *Church, Identity and Change*, edited by David Roozen and James Nieman (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 118. Data shows a significant number of Assembly of God church members claim to believe in the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the initial evidence of speaking in tongues but also report never having spoken in tongues.

⁸ Menzies, “Challenges of Organization and Spirit,” 171.

⁹ Menzies, “Challenges of Organization and Spirit,” 130–31.

These three core values can be traced back to Hot Springs, Arkansas, and the founding of this movement in 1914. The Assemblies of God was founded as a Spirit-empowered (spiritual) cooperative fellowship (relational) for the purpose of world evangelization (missional). These core values are what made the Assemblies of God a great movement. In the words of Stephen Covey they are “true north” principles. When statistics show a growing number of Assembly of God adherents are not experiencing Spirit baptism and a greater number of Assembly of God churches are not cooperating together in fellowship and participating in missionary outreach, the numbers are cause for concern. In his book *Principle-Centered Leadership*, Covey highlights the importance of leaders understanding and embracing core values and emphasizes the inside out rather than outside in approach to change and improvement.

We often think of change and improvement coming from the outside in rather than the inside out. Even if we recognize the need for change from within, we usually think in terms of learning new skills, rather than showing more integrity to basic principles. But significant breakthroughs often represent internal breaks with traditional ways of thinking. I refer to these as paradigm shifts. Principle-centered leadership introduces a new paradigm—that we center our lives and our leadership on certain “true north” principles.¹⁰

In 2002 Byron D. Klaus, President of the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, wrote an article in the *Enrichment Journal* titled, “Pentecostal Leadership for the Long Haul.” The article highlighted the challenges of the Pentecostal leader in the future and mentioned the “dearth of leadership” in the church in general. Klaus looked at current trends within the Assemblies of God and what marked a leader for long-term

¹⁰ Stephen R. Covey, *Principle-Centered Leadership* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 17–18.

effectiveness in ministry. He emphasized three marks of an effective leader; calling, competence and character. “Competence for the Pentecostal minister must include the skill of discernment”—the ability to recognize and differentiate between the “professional” work of the flesh and the divine work of the Holy Spirit. Calling also requires discernment on the part of leadership to recognize and affirm the calling on an individual’s life. Character manifests itself outwardly and indicates an inner holiness and purity of heart wrought by the Spirit. These three marks of an effective leader cannot be taught in a seminary or purchased through a weekend seminar. They are not immediately produced at an altar or transferred by the laying on of hands. These characteristics are works of the Spirit wrought through spiritual disciplines and gifts of grace and must be evident in the life of a spiritual leader. They will produce fruit that is genuine, real and authentic. “Our competence as Pentecostal ministers is ultimately not measured by our capability to produce results but to discern between the results wrought by human effort and the eternal results that only the Spirit can generate.”¹¹

Kent Ingle recently wrote an article in the *Enrichment Journal* entitled “Courageous and Authentic Leadership for Challenging Times.” The article highlighted the importance of the interior life and the need to develop, protect and promote the authenticity and private world of the leader. “The real foundation for transformational ministry lies within the leader himself—in his character, passion and authenticity.”¹² The

¹¹ Byron Klaus, “Pentecostal Leadership for the Long Haul,” *Enrichment Journal*, Spring 2002, accessed March 2, 2015, http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/200202/200202_026_long_haul.cfm.

¹² Kent Ingle, “Courageous and Authentic Leadership for Challenging Times,” *Enrichment Journal*, Winter 2010, accessed January 14, 2017, http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/201001/201001_074_courageous_authentic.cfm.

congregation naturally reflects the leader, takes on the personality of the leader and embraces the passion of the leader, according to Ingle. Neglecting the interior life for any Christian leader will eventually manifest itself in the nature and strength of the congregation, denomination or organization. As a growing number of Assembly of God churches gradually drift from core values and principles, one factor to consider is the gradual drift of Christian leaders from their calling, their practice of spiritual disciplines and their understanding of Church ministry.

These articles by Assembly of God leaders highlight the spiritual nature of Christian ministry and the importance of the interior life for the Pentecostal leader. Drifting from founding principles, core values and teachings, and adopting worldly methodologies and strategies will naturally result from neglecting the interior life and the spiritual disciplines that promote spiritual growth and discernment. Drifting from true north principles has threatened the Church's relevancy and witness throughout history. The Old Testament record of the children of Israel and their history of compromise and disobedience is a warning to the New Testament Church, according to Paul in 1 Cor 10:6 ("Now these things happened as example for us"). The prophets consistently called the people back to the "ancient paths" as these paths were often abandoned for reasons similar to those faced by church leaders today. Israel often drifted from core values and founding principles and tried to be more like her neighbors, while at the same time maintaining the external form of her traditions and religious practices. This same danger faces the contemporary Pentecostal church today as both internal and external forces attempt to redefine pastoral ministry and provide solutions to the growing challenges and difficulties Christian leaders face. Church growth strategies and leadership theories are

constantly offering the latest technique and promises for success. Unfortunately, they often rely on secular models that neglect to prioritize the spiritual nature of Christian leadership and the importance of the interior life. A lack of discernment results from an increased reliance on methodology at the expense of spirituality. The statistics pointing to a growing number of Assembly of God adherents who are not Spirit-filled and where leadership is not partnering in fellowship with others to fund, support and promote missionary outreach, are outward signs of a deeper interior issue. Regardless of the outward signs of life and vitality, whenever the emphasis for church growth is dependent upon programs and personality, or models and methodologies, rather than reliance on the work of the Holy Spirit, His guidance and empowerment for ministry, this is not an authentic Pentecostal church—it has strayed from the ancient paths.

For over three decades Bill Easum has been researching, consulting, training and providing resources to churches, leaders and Christian organizations in the US. He is the founder and president of the Effective Church Group and author of a number of books, including *Leadership on the Other Side*. In an interview over a decade ago, Easum emphasized the need for denominations to return to their roots and to their original directives and purpose for being and mentioned how his own denomination had drifted over the past hundred years.

I see how far my denomination has drifted in 100 to 150 years. With our circuit riders, we put a church in every town in the country over a 100-year period. Now we're centralized and top-down. But if my denomination will go back to its roots, this is where its future lies. Its past is what made it great. Your denomination is the same. Ask yourselves, "What made us great?" That's what you need to recover.¹³

¹³ Bill Easum, "Leadership on the OtherSide," *Enrichment Journal*, Spring 2002, accessed January 14, 2017, http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/200202/200202_018_easum_interview.cfm.

When asked to describe what pastoral leadership would look like in the twenty-first century he emphasized the spiritual nature of Christian ministry and the importance of discernment in leading others.

Leaders function as spiritual directors as opposed to expert teachers. Spiritual directors join with fellow travelers on their journey in personally experiencing God's direction. They help the other person interpret his own story in light of the biblical story. They are interpreters of experience, not experts who deliver information. Spiritual directors help others identify the right path for their lives. They direct mentorees to the needed spiritual disciplines.¹⁴

What Esaum is emphasizing for church leadership in the twenty-first century is a return to core values and founding principles and a renewed emphasis on the interior life of the leader. His words echo the wisdom of the ancient desert movement and a quote from a contemporary Coptic monk from the desert of Wadi El-Natrun, Egypt, Matta El-Meskeen:

It is no joy for the church to have many active members of varied services who lack the spiritual proficiency for renewing souls and regenerating them in a genuine spiritual rebirth to win them for the Kingdom of Heaven. The true joy of the Church lies in leaders who possess spiritual insight, who walk ahead of their flocks so that the flocks can follow a sure path. It is not possible to obtain spiritual insight by action or study. Spiritual insight is attained by silence, retreat and long prayers in their various stages.¹⁵

The interior life of the Christian leader was the emphasis of desert spirituality, and the necessity for spiritual insight to lead others effectively was highlighted by the desert fathers as a priority for Christian ministry and discipleship. Spiritual disciplines that

¹⁴ Esaum, "Leadership on the OtherSide."

¹⁵ St. Mina Monastery, "The Very Reverend Hegumen Father Matta El-Meskeen," accessed May 14, 2015, <http://www.stmina-monastery.org/FrMatta/>.

nurture the interior life and produce the ability to discern the “sure path” are, among others, the practice of silence, solitude and prayer. The sure path is synonymous with the ancient paths in the Old Testament, returning to the roots of the organization in the words of Bill Easum, and rediscovering “true north” principles. Matta El-Meskeen did this by rediscovering and re-appropriating the spirit of the ancient desert movement. It is this same rediscovery that is critical for contemporary Pentecostal leaders entering a new century amidst all of the changes and upheaval in our society and culture. A model of leadership that is faithful to founding principles and core values and that re-appropriates the spirit of those who were present in Hot Springs, Arkansas, over one hundred years ago is critical as the Assemblies of God looks to the future and tries to avoid the gradual drift that is evident in too many churches. Pentecostal leaders must possess the spiritual proficiency to lead others in genuine spiritual rebirth and transformation. The life of Matta El-Meskeen can provide such a model of leadership by examining his obedience to the call of God, his spiritual formation through his return to the desert and the core values and founding principles of the desert movement, and how he has impacted the Coptic Church and Christians of various backgrounds around the world.

II. Matta El-Meskeen

Matta El-Meskeen, or Matthew the Poor, was born in Benha, Egypt, in 1919 as Yousef Iskander and entered monastic life at St. Samuel’s Monastery in 1948. A graduate of Cairo University, he studied pharmacology and after graduation built a successful

pharmacy in Demanhour. He was introduced to the Sunday School movement¹⁶ while studying in Cairo, and became more actively involved in this lay-led movement within the Coptic Orthodox Church after graduation. Matta left his profession at the age of twenty-nine to answer the call of God and sold everything he owned upon entering the monastery. A life of solitude and prayer in the Egyptian desert was his heart's desire, and though he knew little of monasticism, he felt this was the only way to find the freedom he sought. He was eventually joined by others who formed a community around him and followed him in his eremitic life. This desert community under the leadership of Matta El-Meskeen relocated to the ancient monastery of St. Marcarius in Wadi El-Natrun in 1969 following an appeal from the Coptic Patriarch Cyril VI. In much disrepair and decline St. Macarius went through a period of revival and renewal under Matta's leadership. "During the last twenty-five years, the ancient Coptic monasteries in Egypt have experienced a dramatic revival under the guidance of Matta El-Meskeen, who has inspired the renewal precisely by returning to and reappropriating the spirit of the primitive desert movement."¹⁷

Matta El-Meskeen passed away in 2006 and is buried outside the walls of St. Macarius Monastery in Wadi El-Natrun. His influence continues to be felt through his numerous writings and recordings and his popularity throughout the Middle East

¹⁶ The Sunday School movement in the Coptic Church began in the 1920s, somewhat in response to what Coptic leadership considered the 'dangers' of protestant missionary activity. In an effort to keep their flock together and protect them from evangelistic efforts, there was a renewed emphasis within the Church on Bible reading and study among the laity. Coptic youth were exposed to the teachings of the Bible and introduced to the history of Christianity in Egypt. This movement led to a revival in the Coptic Church and a renewal movement in the monasteries.

¹⁷ Douglas Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 23.

continues to grow, even among Arab evangelicals, Protestants, and Catholics. Mattá's appeal to those outside the Coptic Church can perhaps be attributed to his willingness to read and be influenced by the spirituality of Eastern and Western Church fathers, as well as contemporary Protestant and Catholic writers.

The main influences on Mattá's thought and spirituality are the Patristic Fathers, especially Athanasius and Cyril of Alexandria, and the monastic Fathers, especially Macarius the Great, Isaac of Nineveh and Ephram the Syrian. It is clear from Mattá's writings that he was also keen on hearing voices from Russian Orthodoxy, Protestantism and Catholicism.¹⁸

Matta represents a contemporary Christian leader who brought revival and renewal to the Coptic Church by returning to its roots and ancient traditions. More than just a return to practices and doctrine, Matta "reappropriated the spirit of the primitive desert movement."¹⁹ In his own words, "the spirit of the fathers and their thoughts have been deeply impressed upon my own spirit and mind."²⁰ He credits the Holy Spirit and the grace of God with his success and ability to persevere despite numerous obstacles. Throughout his vocation Christ was his passion, the Holy Spirit was his Helper, the Bible was his source and prayer was his life.

Many Christian leaders and pastors today could identify with the intensity of Matta's calling and the opposition he faced, both inwardly and outwardly. They could identify with his desire for purity and holiness and his sense of responsibility to share with others what he had learned along the way. Christian leaders from all denominational

¹⁸ Hani Hanna, "The Historicized Christology of Karl Barth and Mattá al-Miskīn: A Comparison for the Sake of Ecumenical Renewal" (PhD diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 2013), 3.

¹⁹ Burton-Christie, *Word in the Desert*, 24.

²⁰ Matta El-Meskeen, *Orthodox Prayer Life* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's, 2003), 11.

persuasions could identify with his distaste for the political maneuverings and ambition for ecclesiastical power and position prevalent within the Coptic Church and his struggle to maintain an attitude of humility and submission. Matta El-Meskeen displayed patience and perseverance and stayed true to his calling for nearly sixty years. He inspired hundreds to follow in his footsteps and enter the monastic life and inspired hundreds of thousands to visit the monasteries and experience to some degree the spirit of the desert and the revival that has taken place there. He wrote over one hundred books, including more than fifteen volumes of biblical commentaries on the books of the New Testament, and his writings are still being published in numerous languages today. He rebuilt and expanded an ancient monastery, disciplined fellow monks as the spiritual father of St. Macarius for over thirty-five years, and maintained his daily regimen of spiritual disciplines, frequently withdrawing to his cave for extended periods of solitude and prayer. What minister wouldn't want to identify with these accomplishments at the end of their vocation? But for Christian leaders today, identification with a cave in the desert and the strict disciplines of silence and solitude might be difficult to understand and embrace. Could there be any benefit to Christian leaders in the twenty-first century looking at the eremitic lifestyle of a contemporary monk in the desert of Egypt and examining the spiritual disciplines that have been practiced in this environment for nearly two millennia? Is there a leadership model that best captures the style of Matta El-Meskeen and explains the impact he has had, not only on the Coptic Church, but on Christians from a variety of traditions and backgrounds? How can the life of Matta El-Meskeen help Pentecostal leaders today effectively face the numerous challenges of

ministry and impact society in a positive way to faithfully accomplish and fulfill their divine calling over the long haul?

A. Biblical Basis

It would be difficult, to say the least, to look at the desert fathers and the life of Matta El Meskeen as a model for Christian leadership if the basis for their time in the desert was not biblical. Burton-Christie, in his book, *Word in the Desert*, makes a strong argument to support the biblical basis for the desert fathers and their desert movement.

Implicit in the esteem that the desert movement has enjoyed throughout the history of the Christian tradition has been a conviction that it was a genuinely Christian, deeply human, and biblical movement filled with enduring wisdom.²¹

Of the diverse forces which gave rise to and defined the quest for holiness in early monasticism, Scripture stands as one of the most fundamental and influential. Certain key texts from the Scriptures, especially those having to do with renunciation and detachment, stood at the beginning of desert monasticism, serving as primary sources of inspiration for the whole movement.²²

He also suggests that the influences of this movement can be seen and felt throughout church history.

If you study the history of spirituality, or the spiritual life of the church, you will find that each time that there is a spiritual renewal in the Church, the desert fathers are present ... These desert fathers have affected such diverse religious renewal movements as the German Evangelicals and

²¹ Burton-Christie, *Word in the Desert*, 24.

²² Burton-Christie, *Word in the Desert*, 16.

Pietists in Pennsylvania, the *Devotio Moderna* movement in France, and the Methodist revival in England.²³

S. J. Hausherr made a similar observation: “If you study the history of spirituality, or the spiritual life of the church, you will find that each time that there is a spiritual renewal in the Church, the desert fathers are present.”²⁴

B. Pentecostal Connection

Is this enough of a basis to recommend a model from the Egyptian desert for Pentecostal leadership in the twenty-first century. Even if one concedes that the desert movement was biblical and genuinely Christian, what is the connection to the Pentecostal church? Do the paths of the ancient desert movement which began in the fourth century actually converge with the Pentecostal movement? The observations above certainly provide some basis for recognizing the influence of the desert fathers on the renewal movements throughout Church history, including Pentecostalism. Beyond this, in his book *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, Allan Andersen writes the following concerning the Eastern Church and specifically the monasteries:

The subject of gifts of the Spirit had almost become a closed book in the Western Church. Not Eastern—the Orthodox churches have recognized, expected, and controlled the charismata, including speaking in tongues, which has been a continuing experience throughout all the ages among them, though confined mainly to the monasteries ... The Eastern churches continued to practice gifts of the Spirit in their monasteries throughout the

²³ Burton-Christie, *Word in the Desert*, 21, 23. The Pietists and John Wesley were influenced by the desert literature, especially the Homilies of St. Macarius, and the *Devotio Moderna* movement by the *Lives of the Fathers* and the writings of John Cassian.

²⁴ Burton-Christie, *Word in the Desert*, 24.

medieval period. Pneumatology has always been at the center of their theology, and they have always been open to the charismata.²⁵

Andersen goes on to mention some of the instances and individuals who experienced the gifts of the Spirit and speaking in tongues:

The Egyptian monk Pachomius (d. 346) was reported to have spoken in the tongues of angels. ... Basil of Caesarea (330–379) wrote of the working together of the charismata through individual members of the body of Christ. ... The exiled mystic Symeon the New Theologian (949–1022) spoke in tongues and wrote about the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a separate experience from water baptism. ... Gregory of Nazianzus (329–390) mentioned instances of divine healing in his family and of the diversity of the Spirit's gifts. ... Gregory Palamas wrote of experiencing the transcendent God through the Spirit, and of receiving the charismata through the laying on of hands including healing, miracles, tongues and interpretation of tongues.²⁶

In *The Book of the Elders*, a miraculous account is recorded of Abba Poemen offering sound advice to two fellow monks, speaking in a language he did not know.²⁷

In this small saying, which recounts a tremendous miracle, the gift of tongues as at Pentecost, where this man of the desert, this man not of learning, but of divine wisdom, is able to speak in the language of his hearers by God's grace. What he speaks are miraculous words indeed. The content of his speech is more miraculous than the fact that he gives it in this supernatural way.²⁸

²⁵ Wendy Love Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits: Assessing Visions and Visionaries in the Late Middle Ages* (Tubingen: Mohr Seibek, 2011), 21.

²⁶ Anderson, *Discernment of Spirits*, 21–22.

²⁷ John Wortley, trans., *The Book of the Elders: Sayings of the Desert Fathers* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 276 [Poemen 183]. “Abba John who had been exiled by the Emperor Marcian said: We went to Syria one day to see Abba Poemen, and we wanted to ask him about purity of hearts. But the old man did not know Greek, and no interpreter could be found. So seeing our embarrassment, the old man suddenly began to speak in Greek, saying the nature of water is soft and that of stone is hard. But if a bottle is hung above the stone, allowing the water to fall drop-by-drop, it wears away even the hardest stone. So it is with the word of God. It is soft, and our heart is very hard. But the man who hears the word of God often opens his heart to the fear of the Lord.”

²⁸ Matthew Steenberg, “Abba Poemen the Great: On Softening the Hardest of Hearts” (podcast), *A Word from the Holy Fathers: Reflections on Orthodoxy in its Patristic and Monastic Heritage*, December 7, 2009, accessed March 25, 2015, http://www.ancientfaith.com/podcasts/holyfathers/abba_poemen_the_great_on_softening_the_hardest_of_hearts.

This is evidence that Pentecostals in the early twentieth century were not rediscovering unknown paths lost to the Church since the Book of Acts. These ancient paths were familiar and well-known to the desert monks, beginning from the early days of the movement in the fourth century until today. Matta El-Meskeen represents a contemporary desert father who walked these paths in the twentieth century and has shared his experience.

III. Nature and Scope of Research Project

This historical study explores the life of Matta El-Meskeen as a model for pastoral leadership and highlights the importance of spiritual insight, or discernment, as a leadership quality nurtured and developed through spiritual disciplines. These disciplines have been practiced in the deserts of Egypt over the past seventeen hundred years. The primary sources used to explore the life of Matta El-Meskeen were his biography, his own articles and writings, along with interviews and articles written about him. Four visits to St. Macarius Monastery provided opportunity to meet many of the Coptic monks, interview some of Matta's disciples, experience their daily schedule, participate in communal prayers and witness the many different projects currently ongoing at the monastery. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What elements of Matta's life and ministry provide a model of leadership for contemporary Pentecostal pastors (descriptive)
2. What models of leadership help interpret Matta's effectiveness as a leader for contemporary Pentecostal pastors? (interpretive)
3. What biblical-theological perspectives help evaluate Matta's model of leadership for contemporary Pentecostal pastors? (normative)

4. In what ways can the model of Matta provide insight to improve the congregational leadership of contemporary Pentecostal pastors? (pragmatic)

These research questions were examined within the framework of Richard Osmer's model of practical theology and interpretation.

1. What is going on? (descriptive)
2. Why is it going on? (interpretive)
3. What ought to be going on? (normative)
4. How might we respond? (pragmatic)

IV. Thesis Project Overview

A. Authentic Leadership: Interpretive Lens

The following chapter looks at Authentic Leadership Theory as an interpretive lens through which to view the life and leadership of Matta El-Meskeen and surveys the literature relevant to this theory. The second part of the chapter examines the literature related to the desert movement and highlights the prominence and importance of discernment as a quality of leadership and the spiritual disciplines that help to develop this quality.

Authentic Leadership is an emerging field of leadership study still in its early stages of development. It represents a growing trend in leadership research and study based upon the character of the leader and the ability to be genuine and real. "Authentic leaders act in accordance with deep personal values and convictions, to build credibility and win the respect and trust of followers by encouraging diverse viewpoints and building networks of collaborative relationships with followers and thereby lead in a

manner that followers recognize as authentic.²⁹ Authentic leadership has been defined as “a pattern of leader behavior that draws upon and promotes both positive psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate, to foster greater self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers, fostering positive self-development.”³⁰ Four components identified by Walumbwa and associates form the construct of this leadership theory; self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, balanced reasoning and relational transparency. Positive psychological capacities, moral reasoning and critical life events are three additional factors that will influence authentic leadership.

Interest in authentic leadership as a separate field of study gained momentum following the corporate scandals in early 2000 when corruption and greed seemed endemic in corporate America, on Wall Street and in the US banking industry. Until this time authentic leadership was looked at and studied as a branch of transformational leadership. In addition to the many corporate scandals, the threat of terrorism and the attacks on September 11, 2001, left the American public with a growing sense of uncertainty and instability. Such a climate created a greater need for leaders who were honest and real, hopeful and optimistic, aware of themselves and others and had the skills to navigate an ever-changing cultural landscape. Trust became a primary factor in leadership. During turbulent times and in the midst of significant cultural changes people

²⁹ Bruce J. Avolio, “Forward,” in *Authentic Leadership: Clashes, Convergences and Coalescences*, ed. Donna Ladkin and Chellie Spiller (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2013), xxvi.

³⁰ Avolio, “Forward,” xxvi.

were looking for security and stability. “Each era has its own leadership theory that develops in response to the needs of the time and the interests of both practitioners and researchers, and the leadership theory of our epoch is Authentic Leadership.”³¹

Bruce Avolio reflects on the study of authentic leadership over the past decade “since it was reintroduced into the [leadership] literature” and explains how his studies in transformational and positive forms of leadership led to a fork in the road.³² The study of authentic leadership happened, in his words, “accidentally.” For Avolio the driving force for his initial interest and subsequent years of research and study on the construct of authentic leadership has been this question: “What accelerated the development of leadership faster than your heritability program?” In other words how could leadership development be accelerated. Self-awareness, one of the critical components of the Authentic Leadership construct, was challenged and questioned repeatedly in a series of articles written to review the research and data collected over the past ten years on Authentic Leadership. Referring to Plato’s Allegory of the Cave, some of the authors “wonder how authentic leadership, with its focus on the self, can actually produce the selfless and enlightened leaders that it claims to.”³³ A similar premise and argument is often used by Christians in the West who understand monasticism, the flight to the desert and the solitary life as a selfish escape from reality. Far from escaping reality, however,

³¹ Tony Fuscoe, Siobhan O’Riordan, and Stephen Palmer, “Authentic Leaders Are ... Conscious, Competent, Confident and Congruent: A Grounded Theory Approach to Authentic Leadership Group Counseling,” *International Coaching Psychology Review* 10, no. 2 (September 2015): 131.

³² Avolio, “Forward,” xxiii. “Reintroduced in that many prior authors going back to Plato and Aristotle have discussed what it means to be authentic.”

³³ Donna Ladkin and Chellie Spiller, “Introduction: Authentic Leadership: Clashes, Convergences, and Coalescences,” in Ladkin and Spiller, 3.

the monks believed they were following a biblical model practiced by, among others, John the Baptist and Jesus, and were engaging the enemy in a frontal assault. The extreme environment of the desert was what made self-awareness possible and exposed the hidden secrets of the heart. The “cave” that is criticized, both in the secular world and often in the Western Church, figures prominently and quite literally in the lives of the desert fathers and the life of Matta El-Meskeen. The monk’s cell and the eremitic lifestyle combined with spiritual disciplines practiced under the guidance of an elder were the necessary ingredients for authenticity and leadership development.

B. Biblical-Theological Approach: Normative Lens

A biblical theology of authentic leadership is presented in Chapter 3 along with an examination of discernment as defined and understood in both the Old and New Testaments. The metaphor of the shepherd figures prominently in this section as it best defines the leadership God provides for His people and the leadership He expects of those who are called to exercise oversight.

When God wanted to give his people a picture of the way he wanted them to relate together in community, he chose the metaphor of sheep and shepherd ... He chose the shepherd, the human vocation that most closely parallels his own character and his own way of relating to his people.³⁴

Counterfeit leadership, those identified as “false shepherds,” along with the human propensity to self-deception and hypocrisy are highlighted throughout the biblical narrative to reinforce the importance and indispensable quality of discernment for the Christian leader. Inquiring of the Lord and spending time in His presence—prayer,

³⁴ E. Glenn Wagner, *Escape from Church, Inc.: The Return of the Pastor-Shepherd* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 29.

silence, and solitude—are characteristics of the authentic leader and nurture the development of discernment.

“Leadership is a relational phenomenon” according to Ladkin and Spiller, and every relationship entails two things according to Anthony De Mello in his book *Awareness*;³⁵ “clarity of perception (insight/discernment) and accuracy of response.”³⁶ Matta E-Meskeen emphasized the need for spiritual insight for Christian leaders to guide people safely and effectively, and Dr. Byron Klaus highlighted its importance for the Pentecostal leader in the twenty-first century. A. W. Tozer identified the lack of discernment in leadership as the number one reason for the church’s decline.³⁷

The patristic writings of Origen, Antony, Athanasius, Poemen, Evagrius, John Cassian, Benedict of Nursia, and Gregory the Great, emphasize not only the importance of discernment but its relationship to self-knowledge and self-awareness. These two are essential to spiritual progress according to the desert fathers. Self-awareness is a significant component in the Authentic Leadership construct and discernment is the gift necessary to help “clear the path.” Historically this path is followed from the Egyptian

³⁵ Ladkin and Spiller, “Introduction,” 1.

³⁶ Anthony De Mello, *Awareness: The Perils and Opportunities of Reality* (New York: Bantam Doubleday, 1990), 116–17.

³⁷ A. W. Tozer, “Wanted God Seers,” *Tozer Devotional*, April 14, 2013, accessed May 3, 2015, <http://www.cmalliance.org/devotions/tozer?id=884>. A. W. Tozer looked at the weakened condition of the church of his day. Many factors contributed to this weakness, and he hesitated to simplify the problem and mention just one. The complexity of religion and modern society necessitated caution in diagnosing the sickness and prescribing the cure according to Tozer. He used words such as disease, woes, defect, spiritual troubles and rapid decline to describe the spiritual condition and state of the church and concluded with this observation: “I can only say that I have observed one significant lack among evangelical Christians which might turn out to be the real cause of most of our spiritual troubles. Of course, if that were true, then the supplying of that lack would be our most critical need. The great deficiency to which I refer is the lack of spiritual discernment, especially among our leaders.”

deserts to the monasteries in the West and continues throughout church history in the writings of many including Ignatius of Loyola, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Bernadine of Siena, John Wesley, and Jonathan Edwards.

C. Historical Review: Matta's Life and Ministry

Chapter 4 examines the historical context of Egypt in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and highlights the Western influences and the foreign missionary activity occurring in the country around the turn of the twentieth century. The Sunday School movement in the Coptic Church, a result of these outside influences and a reaction against the corrupt clergy and ineffective leadership within the Church, was a significant factor and powerful influence on Matta's early life. The religious, political, and social dynamics occurring in Egypt shortly before Matta El-Meskeen was born were reshaping the landscape and setting the stage for renewal and revival within the Coptic Church. Leadership emerges within an historical context, and Matta El-Meskeen is one of a handful of significant leaders emerging from the Sunday School movement.

The life of Matta El-Meskeen is presented in Chapter 5 and his leadership is examined within the framework of Authentic Leadership Theory. Critical life events are highlighted and particular attention is given to his spiritual formation and the disciplines he practiced in the desert. Primary and secondary source documents were used in the historical research and include the biography of Matta El-Meskeen, his writings and recorded sermons, along with numerous articles and a handful of theses that have been written about him over the past thirty years. Informal interviews were conducted onsite in Egypt and were helpful to fill in the gaps, corroborate accuracy of information and

understand more fully the impact of Matta's life and leadership on the Coptic Church and the monastic movement.

The final chapter provides an analysis of the research conducted and explores ways for contemporary Pentecostal pastors to benefit from this historical case study and improve their leadership by strengthening their inner lives and becoming more authentic leaders. The spiritual disciplines practiced in the desert were not unfamiliar to Pentecostal pioneers of the early twentieth century. Chapter 6 highlights this evidence from early Pentecostal magazines and journals and looks at ways the desert lifestyle can be transferred to and benefit contemporary pastors and Christian leaders in modern America. Matta highlighted silence, solitude and "long prayers in their various stages," what Pentecostals would call "tarrying," for leadership development and attaining spiritual insight. Rediscovering core values and experiencing the fullness of the Spirit-filled life are critical for contemporary Pentecostal pastors to effectively lead this current generation into the fullness of Pentecost and greater authenticity in their witness and leadership.

CHAPTER 2:

AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP AND DISCERNMENT

Becoming a leader is synonymous with becoming yourself. It is precisely that simple and also that difficult.

—Warren Bennis

I. Authentic Leadership Theory

The general consensus that there is a lack of leadership in our world today—a world that is ever changing, more uncertain and threatening, and increasingly interdependent—has led to a greater sense of fear and insecurity. Both the character and capability of leaders to steer and command the ship through stormy seas seems to be a rare combination to find in these days. Whether the threat is corruption and greed from within or terrorism, cyber-attacks and other forms of violence from without, numerous examples of corporate scandals, government corruption and random acts of physical violence have left the general public scarred, cynical and somewhat traumatized. Christian (spiritual) leadership has its own unique challenges and dangers, in addition to the ones already mentioned, particularly in the western post-modern world of secularism and relativism. Keen spiritual insight is needed for Christian leaders to navigate the changing cultural landscape without compromising the fundamental message and mission of the church. Numerous leadership theories have been studied and proposed in order to better understand and develop the necessary character and capabilities for effective leadership. The most recent of these, coming out of the study of transformational leadership, is Authentic Leadership Theory. In some ways Authentic Leadership Theory is a response to the turbulent times in which we live and the need for greater transparency

and trust. The first part of this chapter looks at authentic leadership as an interpretive lens through which to view the history of the desert fathers and the contemporary life of Matta El-Meskeen as a model for Pentecostal leadership in the twenty-first century. The second part looks at discernment as a necessary characteristic of authentic leadership, its importance in the desert tradition and how this characteristic was understood and developed.

Leadership theories and models proposed and studied in western institutions and settings are obviously far removed from the deserts of the early church fathers and culturally foreign to the ideas of leadership within the ancient Coptic Church in Egypt. Spanning the geographical and cultural divide of east and west and considering the vast difference between spiritual leadership within the church and secular leadership within corporations and public institutions, the use of any such “foreign” lens requires a certain degree of flexibility and adaptability within the framework. Authentic leadership, however, offers a unique perspective given its ancient context within Greek thought and the discussions by Aristotle and Plato on what it means to be authentic.¹

A. Authentic Leadership Summit

In the heartland of America on the campus of the University of Nebraska Lincoln in 2004, the first summit on Authentic Leadership Development was held. Bruce Avolio, Director of the Gallup Leadership Institute and Co-Director of the UNL/Gallup MBA/MA program in Executive Leadership, had been studying positive forms of

¹ Bruce J. Avolio, “Forward,” in *Authentic Leadership: Clashes, Convergences and Coalescences*, ed. Donna Ladkin and Chellie Spiller (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2013), xxiii.

leadership and examining how leadership developed “genuinely.” In what he described as a “research accident” or a fork in the road, Avolio along with other colleagues began defining and looking at ways to develop authentic leadership. The guiding question to their research was the following: “What accelerated the development of leadership faster than your heretibility programme?”² The summit led to a series of articles in *The Leadership Quarterly* in 2005,³ “in which seven papers were chosen focusing on the development of what constitutes authentic leadership and its development.” In addition to these articles, the other significant literary contribution coming out of the summit in 2004 was the book *Authentic Leadership Theory and Practice: Origins, Effects and Development*.

B. Authenticity Defined

The authors of *Authentic Leadership Theory and Practice: Origins, Effects and Development* begin their discussion of authenticity by stating what it is not. “Authenticity is not *sincerity*. ... It is more than a feeling and has to do primarily with *being* true to

² Avolio, “Foreword,” xxiv.

³ These articles included: Remus Ilies, Fredrick Morgeson, and Jennifer Nahrgang, “Authentic Leadership and Eudaemonic Well-Being: Understanding Leader-Follower Outcomes,” *Leadership Quarterly* 16 (2005): 373–94; Cecily D. Cooper, Terri A. Scandura, and Chester A. Schriesheim, “Looking Forward but Learning from Our Past: Potential Challenges to Developing Authentic Leadership Theory and Authentic Leaders,” *Leadership Quarterly* 16, no. 3 (June 2005): 475–93; Fred Walumbwa, Peng Wang, Hui Wang, John Schaubroeck, and Bruce Avolio, “Psychological Processes Linking Authentic Leadership to Follower Behaviors,” *The Leadership Quarterly* 21 (2010): 901–14; William L. Gardner, Bruce J. Avolio, Fred Luthans, Douglas R. May, and Fred Walumbwa, “Can You See the Real Me? A Self-Based Model of Authentic Leader and Follower Development,” *Leadership Quarterly* 16, no. 3 (June 2005): 343–72; Boas Shamir and Galit Eilam, “What’s Your Story? A Life-Stories Approach to Authentic Leadership Development,” *Leadership Quarterly* 16 (2005): 395–417; Alice Eagley, “Achieving Relational Authenticity in Leadership: Does Gender Matter?” *Leadership Quarterly* 16, no. 3 (June 2005): 459–74.

one's self."⁴ Sincerity can only be expressed in relation to others, whereas the authors understand authenticity "is self-contained and does not require the presence of another for its reality to become manifest."⁵ Their understanding of authenticity assumes "that there is a coherent phenomenological self that one can be true to,"⁶ an assumption that will be challenged a decade later by the contributors to *Authentic Leadership*. Authenticity is also not impression management or self-monitoring. The authentic person is one who relies on internal information and values rather than external circumstances and pressures to determine behavior and actions. The authors mention Berman who describes inauthenticity as "the determination of men to hide themselves not merely from others but from themselves."⁷ This "hiding" certainly has biblical connection in reference to man and is significant to the desert movement and the early fathers' understanding of spiritual formation and leadership development. According to Harter authenticity can be defined as "owning one's personal experience, be they thoughts, emotions, needs, preferences, or beliefs, processes captured by the injunction to know oneself" and behaving in accordance with the true self."⁸

⁴ William L. Gardner, Bruce J. Avolio, and Fred O. Walumbwa, eds., *Authentic Leadership Theory and Practice: Origins, Effects and Development*, Monographs in Leadership and Management 3 (Bingley: Emerald Group, 2005), 6.

⁵ Gardner, Avolio, and Walumbra, *Authentic Leadership Theory and Practice*, 6. This understanding of authenticity being independent of others would be challenged a decade later by the contributors to *Authentic Leadership*, edited by Ladkin and Spiller.

⁶ Gardner, Avolio, and Walumbra, *Authentic Leadership Theory and Practice*, 6.

⁷ Gardner, Avolio, and Walumbra, *Authentic Leadership Theory and Practice*, 7.

⁸ Biplob Datta, "Assessing the Effectiveness of Authentic Leadership," *International Journal of Leadership Studies*, Vol. 9, Iss. 1, 2015, 63.

Much of the literature on authentic leadership refers back to ancient Greek philosophy and the admonition to “know thyself.”⁹ According to philosopher and classical scholar Alexander Nehamas, Plato considered authenticity to be his central philosophical concern. In his book *Virtues of Authenticity: Essays on Plato and Socrates*, Nehamas presents a collection of essays centered on this theme.

The papers are unified in theme by the idea that Plato’s central philosophical concern in metaphysics, ethics, and aesthetics was to distinguish the authentic from the fake, the original from its imitations ... Nehamas argues in the book that Plato’s specific judgments of what is authentic is often flawed, but that his idea of authenticity as the mark of truth, beauty and goodness is stronger than many modern scholars have assumed.¹⁰

The four cardinal virtues of prudence, temperance, justice and courage were thought to make a person more authentic on both an interpersonal and intrapersonal level. These four virtues, later adopted by St. Ambrose and St. Augustine, could easily fit into the theoretical model of authentic leadership.

C. Background to Authentic Leadership

In the foreword to Ladkin and Spiller’s *Authentic Leadership*, Avolio traces his interest in leadership development back to the conference on transformational and charismatic leadership in Montreal in 1987. A comment made by Warren Bennis voicing

⁹ Andrew Scholtz, “Gnothi Sauton—Know Thyself,” 2006, accessed April 17, 2017, https://www.binghamton.edu/cnes/docs/gnothi_sauton.pdf. Though not original to Plato, it is used frequently in his writings. ‘Know thyself’ was inscribed on the wall of Apollo’s Temple at Delphi, along with the saying ‘nothing to excess’. These were the defining bywords of Greek culture and thought. The most important knowledge for Socrates to pursue was self-knowledge. “The unexamined life is not worth living” (Plato *Symposium*).

¹⁰ Alexander Nehamas, *Virtues of Authenticity: Essays on Plato and Socrates* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), accessed April 15, 2017, <http://press.princeton.edu/titles/6351.html>.

his concern that transformational and charismatic leadership development could fall into the wrong hands “and be used by the wrong people for the wrong purpose” would become a catalyst many years later.¹¹ Avolio and his colleagues, considering this possibility, would begin to explore more fully the difference between authentic and inauthentic leaders and followers. It was therefore out of the construct of transformational and charismatic leadership that authentic leadership was introduced.¹²

In 1978 James MacGregor Burns wrote his groundbreaking book, *Leadership*, and introduced the distinction between transactional and transformational leadership. Up until this point leadership study had focused mainly on leaders and their behaviors. Burns introduced the importance of the relationship between followers and leaders. He defined transactional leadership as a reciprocal relationship where leaders and followers exchange support and rewards that are mutually beneficial. As a political historian and biographer, Burns saw much of political leadership as transactional. The relationship exists to meet the basic needs of followers. Transforming, or transformational leadership, relies less on exchange and more on trust and loyalty between the leader and follower.

The transforming leader looks for potential motives in followers, seeks to satisfy higher needs, and engages the full person of the follower. The result of this leadership is a mutual relationship that converts followers into leaders and leaders into moral agents. The concept of moral leadership is proposed as a means for leaders to take responsibility for their leadership and to aspire to satisfy the needs of the followers.¹³

¹¹ Avolio, “Foreword,” xxv.

¹² Avolio, “Foreword,” xxiii. Reintroduced according to Avolio, “in that many prior authors going back to Plato and Aristotle have discussed what it means to be authentic.”

¹³ Jan Stewart, “Transformational Leadership: An Evolving Concept Examined through the Works of Burns, Bass, Avolio and Leithwood,” *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, no. 54 (June 2006): 9.

“Transformational leadership will have a transforming effect on both the leader and the follower. Done properly, each will raise the others to higher levels of motivation and moral action.”¹⁴ The motivation of the follower is highlighted between these two forms; the former relying on extrinsic motivation, while the latter on intrinsic motivation.

Burns theorized that transforming and transactional leadership were mutually exclusive styles. Transactional leaders usually do not strive for cultural change in the organization but they work in the existing culture while transformational leaders can try to change organizational culture.¹⁵

Bernard Bass furthered the work of Burns in 1985 in his book *Leadership and Performance Beyond Expectations*.

At the heart of the theory of transformational leadership is the notion that leadership goes beyond getting the work done (transactional leadership) and maintaining quality relationships with followers (transforming leadership). Bass stated, “The transformational leader motivates us to do more than we originally expected to do.”¹⁶

¹⁴ Mike Clayton, “James MacGregor Burns: Transforming Leadership,” *Management Pocketbooks*, October 13, 2015, accessed November 17, 2016, <https://managementpocketbooks.wordpress.com/2015/10/13/james-macgregor-burns-transforming-leadership/>. Jim Allen McCleskey, “Situational, Transformational and Transactional Leadership and Leadership Development,” *Journal of Business Studies Quarterly* 5, no. 4 (2014): 120. “The transformational leader convinced his followers to transcend their self-interest for the sake of the organization, while elevating the followers’ level of need on Maslow’s hierarchy from lower-level concerns for safety and security to higher-level needs for achievement and self-actualization.”

¹⁵ “Transformational Leadership,” originally published on *Wikipedia.org*, October 11, 2011; archived at *Langston University*, accessed November 17, 2016, <http://www.langston.edu/sites/default/files/basic-content-files/TransformationalLeadership.pdf>.

¹⁶ Kelly McInnes, “Learner Paper: The Evolution of Leadership and Mentorship From 1975–Present,” August 1, 2009, 3, accessed January 26, 2018, <http://integralleadershippreview.com/4659-learner-paper-the-evolution-of-leadership-and-mentorship-from-1975-present/>

More is accomplished because followers are stimulated to unselfishness, faithfulness and loyalty to the organization.¹⁷ Bass modified the transformational leadership construct, which would later come to include the four I's: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration. Bass and Riggio in their classic book, *Transformational Leadership*, explained how this construct works:

Transformational leaders ... are those who stimulate and inspire followers to both achieve extraordinary outcomes and, in the process, develop their own leadership capacity. Transformational leaders help followers grow and develop into leaders by responding to individual followers' needs by empowering them and by aligning the objectives and goals of the individual followers, the leader, the group and the larger organization.¹⁸

Robert Quinn has studied leadership and change for a number of years and has written eighteen books on his extensive research and experience. Quinn is the co-founder and director of the Center for Positive Organizations and chairs the Ross School of Business at the University of Michigan. As consultant, teacher, and writer he has spoken to over half of the Fortune 500 companies with a mission to inspire positive change in organizations and individuals. In his best-selling book *Deep Change* written in 1996, Quinn presented the argument that every individual and every organization is facing the same fundamental dilemma: "deep change or slow death."¹⁹ In the preface Quinn made the following assertion: "One person can change the larger system or organization in

¹⁷ Roger Givens, "Transformational Leadership: The Impact on Organizational and Personal Outcomes," *Emerging Leadership Journeys* 1, no. 1 (2008): 8.

¹⁸ Bernard Bass and Ronald Riggio, *Transformational Leadership*, 2nd ed. (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006), 3.

¹⁹ Julie Anding, "An Interview with Robert E. Quinn. Entering the Fundamental State of Leadership: Reflections on the Path to Transformational Teaching," *Academy of Management, Learning and Education* 4, no. 4 (December 2005): 489.

which he or she exists.”²⁰ In order to change the larger system, deep change must begin in the individual. Because our natural inclination is to resist change in favor of personal comfort and maintaining control, we must choose deep change or await a crisis that necessitates it. Experiencing deep change personally is what empowers an individual to bring change to others. In his second book in the trilogy, *Change the World*, Quinn presents four different ways that change can occur: telling or convincing, forcing, participating, or increasing our own moral power through self-change.²¹ Completing the trilogy series in 2004, *Building the Bridge as You Walk On It* introduces the concept of the “fundamental state of leadership.” Quinn argues that we spend most of our time in the normal state which he defines as comfort centered, externally driven, self-focused and externally closed.²² The fundamental state of leadership is described as results centered, internally driven, other-focused and externally open. In this state, according to Quinn, “we transform and we become transformational. We become a positive deviant.”²³ Quinn’s research and writing, especially in relation to this trilogy written from 1996–2004, shows the natural progression which occurred in the late 1990s and early 2000s from the study of transformational leadership to authentic leadership.

²⁰ Robert Quinn, *Change the World: How Ordinary People Can Accomplish Extraordinary Results* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), xii.

²¹ Anding, “Interview with Robert E. Quinn,” 489. “We become transformational by monitoring and reducing our own hypocrisy,” according to Quinn. Personal integrity becomes the fundamental key to the success and life of any enterprise.

²² Anding, “Interview with Robert E. Quinn,” 489.

²³ Anding, “Interview with Robert E. Quinn,” 489.

D. Authentic Leadership Theory

In his book *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, Peter Northouse introduces authentic leadership as “one of the newest areas of leadership research.”²⁴ As with leadership in general, authentic leadership is hard to define and definitions vary depending on differing viewpoints.²⁵ These viewpoints, according to Northouse, can include intrapersonal, interpersonal and developmental. The developmental approach looks at leadership as something that can be nurtured and developed over time and not as a fixed set of traits. Both the practical and theoretical approaches to Authentic Leadership are presented and backed up by real life experiences and research within the field of social science. Northouse highlights two practical approaches, one by Robert Tenny which is action centered and focuses on problem solving, and the other by Bill George. George’s approach looks at the qualities and characteristics of authentic leaders and how these can be developed. These characteristics include purpose, values, relationships, self-discipline and heart.²⁶ In the Preface to his book, *Discover Your True North*, George credits Warren Bennis with dispelling the myth that leaders are born and leadership can

²⁴ Peter Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 7th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2013), 253.

²⁵ Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 262. Northouse selected the definition of authentic leadership by Walumbwa et al. (2008) as “a pattern of leader behavior that draws upon and promotes both positive psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate, to foster greater self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers, fostering positive self-development.” Avolio, “Foreword,” xxvi. Avolio et al. (2004) started with a simple definition stating that authentic leaders “act in accordance with deep personal values and convictions, to build credibility and win the respect and trust of followers by encouraging diverse viewpoints and building networks of collaborative relationships with followers, and thereby lead in a manner that followers recognize as authentic.”

²⁶ Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 258.

be reduced to a certain set of genetic characteristics. Bennis understood leadership as a “lifelong process of self-discovery”: “he showed how leaders develop through their life experiences, are shaped by their crucibles and emerge ever stronger to take on responsibilities of leadership. He said unequivocally, ‘Leadership is character.’”²⁷

This lifelong process and how leadership development can be accelerated is what guided the early research according to Avolio.²⁸ The theoretical model formulated by this research highlights the process of leadership development and presents the four basic and inter-related components of Authentic Leadership: self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, balanced processing and relational transparency. In addition to these four components, the model identifies positive psychological capacities, moral reasoning and critical life events as significant factors in the development of authentic leaders. It is this theoretical model that will be used to look at the leadership of Abuna Matta El-Meskeen as an authentic Christian leader.

E. Defining the Components of ALT

1. *Self-awareness*: An emerging process whereby an individual “comes to understand his or her unique talents, strengths, sense of purpose, core values, beliefs and desires.” The four elements of self-awareness include values, understanding identity, emotions and motives/goals.²⁹

²⁷ Bill George, *True North: Discover Your Authentic Leadership*, (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 301.

²⁸ See footnote 2.

²⁹ Bruce Avolio and William Gardner, “Authentic Leadership Development: Getting to the Root of Positive Forms of Leadership,” *Leadership Quarterly* 16, no. 3 (June 2005): 324.

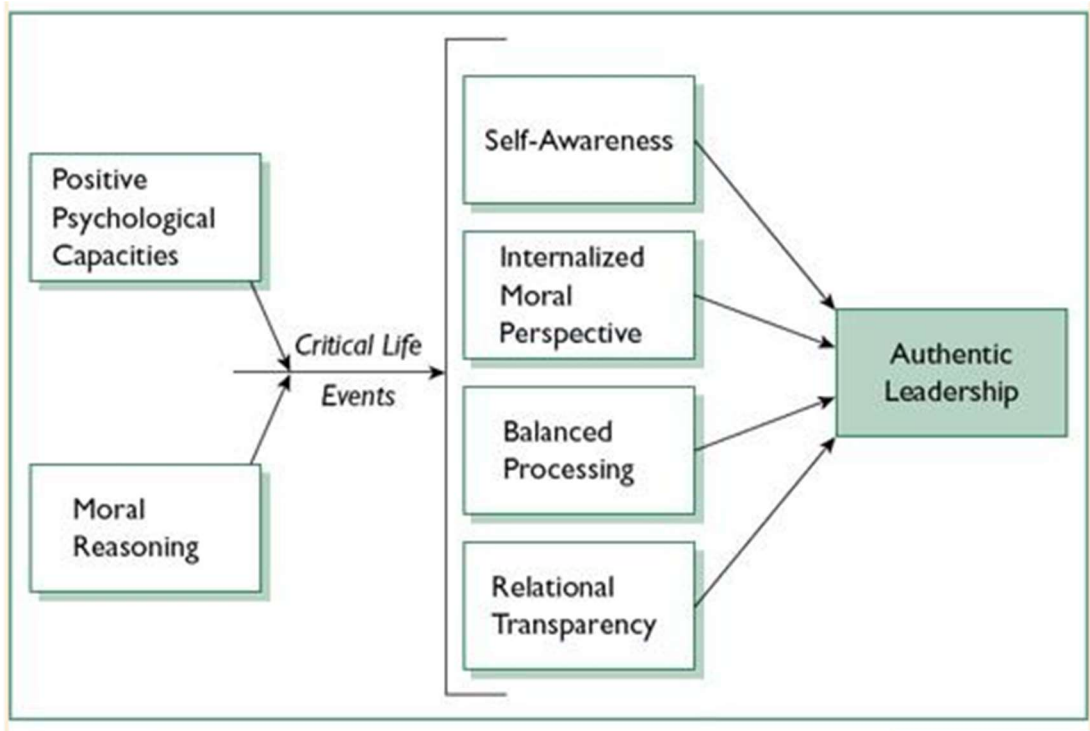


Figure 1. Authentic leadership model³⁰

2. *Internalized moral perspective*: This is a quality whereby individual behavior is determined by core values and morals and not external pressures or demands. The ability for self-control or self-regulation insures alignment and consistency between personal values and leadership action.
3. *Balanced processing*: The ability to make decisions objectively without bias³¹ or favoritism based upon correct analysis and understanding of the information and

³⁰ Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 263.

³¹ Avolio and Gardner, "Authentic Leadership Development," 317. Explanation is given as to why the terminology 'balanced' rather than 'unbiased' processing was used. Kernis (M. H. Kernis, "Toward a Conceptualization of Optimal Self-Esteem," *Psychological Inquiry* 14 [2003]: 126) and Ilies, Morgeson, and Nahrgang ("Authentic Leadership and Eudaemonic Well-Being") preferred the latter in their model. "Extensive research from cognitive psychology indicates humans are inherently flawed and biased information processors."

issues at hand. It includes a willingness to listen to other viewpoints and perspectives and consider the opinions of others before action is taken.

4. *Relational transparency*: This describes an individual's willingness to be open and honest in an appropriate manner with others, sharing aspects of themselves that are both positive and negative.
5. *Critical life events*: These are both positive and negative life events that have a significant impact on a person and shape their lives in critical ways. They often serve as catalysts for change and personal growth. The life story of the leader is often defined by these events based upon how they interpret and respond to these experiences.
6. *Positive psychological capacities*: These are identified as confidence, hope, optimism and resiliency and are considered attributes that are both trait-like and state-like. Traits indicate attributes that may be inherited characteristics of personality and states indicate the possibility of training and developing these attributes.
7. *Moral reasoning*: "The authentic leader has the capacity to make ethical decisions about issues of right or wrong and good or bad."³² Moral capacity is developed and drawn upon to address ethical issues and insure moral action and integrity.

³² Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 265.

Honesty, transparency and a willingness to promote the greater good above selfish interest or personal benefit characterize the decision making process.³³

Authenticity involves relationship between leaders and followers characterized by:³⁴

1. transparency, openness and trust,
2. guidance toward worthy objectives,
3. an emphasis on follower development.

In the preface to *Authentic Leadership Theory and Practice: Origins, Effects and Development*,³⁵ the authors identify authentic leaders as those who:

1. Know who they are and what they believe in.
2. Display transparency and consistency between their values, ethical reasoning and actions.
3. Focus on developing positive psychological states such as confidence, optimism, hope and resilience within themselves and their associates.
4. Are widely known and respected for their integrity.

Since the first summit at the University of Nebraska in 2004 and the articles and book that followed, interest in authentic leadership and its development has continued to grow. In 2013 Ladkin and Spiller edited a volume of articles in a book titled *Authentic*

³³ Avolio and Gardner, “Authentic Leadership Development,” 324.

³⁴ Mats Alvesson and Stefan Sveningsson, “Essay: Authentic Leadership Critically Reviewed,” in Ladkin and Spiller, 42; Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, and Walumbra, “Can You See the Real Me?” 345.

³⁵ Gardner, Avolio, and Walumbra, *Authentic Leadership Theory and Practice*, xxiii.

Leadership.³⁶ Avolio wrote in the preface to this book how the growth nearly a decade later had been exponential.

We find there have now been over 800 studies launched, from master's theses to complex field research projects, which are focusing on examining what constitutes authentic leadership and its development. There is also a large group of scholars and practitioners, who meet regularly at the Academy of Management meetings, who are also examining the theory, research and practice associated with authentic leadership. So the work on authentic leadership is very much alive and well, growing dramatically in terms of numbers of studies and potential impact on the way we assess, develop and evaluate authentic leadership and its development in leaders, followers, teams and organizations.³⁷

He mentions the vast amount of research in different leadership orientations and theories, specifically charismatic, transformational and authentic, and how this has been carried out cross-culturally in different settings and organizations.

We have learned a lot about how varying leadership orientations or styles affect different observers of leadership through to how these varying leadership orientations emerge and are sustained across different organizations, industries and national cultures ... through rigorous theoretical development and subsequent research spanning every population, culture and context, we have discovered a number of consistencies that provide a very practical foundation for advancing the assessment, evaluation and development of leaders and this form of leadership.³⁸

Rather than offering a critique on the contribution of others and their study of authentic leadership, Avolio states his goal has been "creating pathways to be pursued."³⁹ The

³⁶ Contributors to this volume included individuals from Australia, the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand, China, South Africa, Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Israel.

³⁷ Avolio, "Foreword," xxiii.

³⁸ Avolio, "Foreword," xxiii.

³⁹ Avolio, "Foreword," xxvi.

articles included in Ladkin and Spiller's *Authentic Leadership* are just a few of the "pathways" being pursued in the current study of authentic leadership.

The editors Ladkin and Spiller describe the two challenges they faced when considering the original construct of authentic leadership and the different components making up the theoretical model; first, their understanding of leadership as being relational in nature and occurring in a specific moment of time and not simply the actions of an individual leader, and second, the nature of self as being fluid and not "as a clearly defined and well-bounded entity."⁴⁰ The definition of "self" is challenged by a number of the contributors and concerns are expressed that self-awareness through reflection can lead to self-indulgence and self-absorption.⁴¹ Too much focus on the self "promotes elitist leader centrism."⁴² Plato's Cave is referenced more than once and the idea of distancing for self-reflection is raised as a cause for concern and potentially dangerous to the leadership process. Jones and Grint emphasize the "elitist" nature of the Allegory of the Cave.⁴³

Only a select few are able to make sense of the shadows on the wall of the cave (private reflection) and to return to the world of mortals to tell them (dictate) how they should go about their lives (leading). This is a form of

⁴⁰ Donna Ladkin and Chellie Spiller, "Introduction: Authentic Leadership: Clashes, Convergences, and Coalescences," in Ladkin and Spiller, 2.

⁴¹ Alvesson and Sveningsson, "Authentic Leadership Critically Reviewed," 49. "Whether or not a 'true self' actually exists is itself highly questionable."

⁴² Ladkin and Spiller, "Introduction," 3.

⁴³ Plato, *The Republic*, Amazon Classics, August 8, 2017. The "Allegory of the Cave presents prisoners chained in a cave, only able to see the stone wall in front of them and the shadows of things passing by on the outside. When one escapes and sees the outside world, he realizes everything he has seen is simply shadow and he returns to inform his fellow prisoners. They refuse to listen and threaten to kill him if he sets them free. The escaped prisoner represents the philosopher who ventures outside of the cave for knowledge and no longer relies on what he has seen on the cave wall.

leadership that advocates, and indeed celebrates, individualism and isolationism: the further removed a leader can be from followers the better.⁴⁴

What is necessary and highlighted by Jones and Grint is the interaction between leaders and followers; that authenticity is an action that must be “practiced” in the context of relationship and cannot be known simply by the individualized self. Jones and Grint also mention the difficulty in defining what is moral, especially if one assumes there is no universal moral code.

Alvesson and Sveningsson in Chapter 3 mention the obvious religious undertones to the whole construct of authentic leadership using words such as “convictions,” “missions,” “virtues,” and “moral.” The terms “sacrifice,” “martyr,” “prophet,” and “saint” are mentioned by the authors as well, only reinforcing this religious component. In their minds the authentic leader is portrayed as some extraordinary individual like Jesus or Buddha, “moral giants capable of saving the world.”⁴⁵ These terms serve only to reinforce the perception that leaders are “separate” from the people and everything of significance revolves around them. The authors also point out that what passes as authentic behavior is difficult, if not impossible, to assess. “It is nearly impossible to investigate authenticity.”⁴⁶ In their final analysis Alvesson and Sveningsson conclude that Authentic Leadership Theory, in its original construct, is more ideological than intellectual.

⁴⁴ Owain Smolović Jones and Keith Grint, “Essay: Authentic Leadership and History,” in Ladkin and Spiller, 22.

⁴⁵ Alvesson and Sveningsson, “Authentic Leadership Critically Reviewed,” 44.

⁴⁶ Alvesson and Sveningsson, “Authentic Leadership Critically Reviewed,” 46.

The difficulty of discovering the true authentic self and being led by this self-knowledge or self-awareness is repeated often in the different articles. Examples are given of people trying too hard to be authentic and thereby alienating those around them.⁴⁷ The ability to be fully present, both with one's self and with others, is a skill that is "forged and honed at the intersections where we meet our potential selves and other's selves, in a multiplicity of contexts and circumstances."⁴⁸ Authenticity must align with the institutions and organizations where leadership occurs and this can become especially problematic when working cross-culturally.⁴⁹ The relational importance of authenticity is repeatedly stressed, for example Taylor mentions the need for vulnerability and self-exposure within the context of relationship. Authenticity within community shifts the emphasis away from individualistic centrist leadership to a more collectivist approach. It also highlights the fluidity and evolving nature of the self in action.

The final section of the book returns to where Authentic Leadership Theory began in its early research, which is developing authentic leaders. Lotte Dorso writes from her

⁴⁷ Helen Nicholson and Brigid Carroll, "Essay: So You Want to Be Authentic in Your Leadership: To Whom and for What End?" in Ladkin and Spiller, 287. Annie is used as an example in chapter 26 of an individual who is obviously self-absorbed and trying too hard to find her true self for the wrong reasons. "I want to be amazing. I want to be recognized and valued as someone who makes a difference ... I want to be someone that others see as inspirational."

⁴⁸ Ladkin and Spiller, "Introduction," 9.

⁴⁹ Ladkin and Spiller, "Introduction," 11. Ladkin and Spiller refer to the work of Wang and Turnbull James, who present an example of Chinese nationals working under the leadership of non-Chinese managers and how these Chinese workers' behavior was interpreted as negative. They note, "Authenticity has to be worked in the tension between the individual's sense of self and the enveloping context." See Lake Wang and Kim Turnbull James, "Cameo: The Challenge for Authentic Leadership in Multi-Cultural Settings," in Ladkin and Spiller, 259–63.

own experience and practice in an executive master education program that “being authentic and innovative *cannot* be taught.”

Participating leaders are best invited to engage in a process of direct experience, reflection and discovery in a well-prepared and inspirational context ... competencies can't be taught through lectures and theory; they can only be developed through experience, reflection and practice.⁵⁰

Boje, Helmuth and Saylor highlight the importance of creating authentic living stories

and contrast these with dominant narratives and inauthentic stories that we all have.

Authentic “living stories” are created when leaders “integrate their past experiences, their future expectations, and their own potentiality for being a whole-Self while

deconstructing their inauthentic selves.”⁵¹ Narrative therapy is a way to rewrite or

“restory” certain critical life events that are negatively affecting one’s behavior. The

importance of constructing life-stories is highlighted in the early research by Shamir and

Eilam in their 2005 article “What’s Your Story? A Life-Stories Approach to Authentic

Leadership Development.” Self-awareness and self-knowledge are enhanced when the

leader is able to integrate and provide meaning to past experiences. The integration of

these experiences leads to the life-story. “The construction of a life-story is a major

element in the development of authentic leaders” because it helps to clarify core values

and convictions and leads to a better understanding of the present self.⁵²

It is through life experiences and the way they are organized into life-stories that people can develop a self-concept of a leader that supports and justifies their leadership role because the life-story not only recounts but

⁵⁰ Lotte Darsø, “Cameo: Developing Authentic, Innovative Leaders,” in Ladkin and Spiller, 282.

⁵¹ David M. Boje, Catherine A Helmuth, and Rohny Saylor, “Cameo: Spinning Authentic Leadership Living Stories of the Self,” in Ladkin and Spiller, 272.

⁵² Shamir and Eilam, “What’s Your Story?” 396.

also justifies. Life stories are not only “who am I” stories but also “why am I here” stories.⁵³

The authentic leadership ‘pathways’ that Avolio had hoped to create have led to a variety of settings in different geographical locations around the world. The numerous countries represented by the contributors to Ladkin and Spiller’s *Authentic Leadership* are indicative of the international appeal of authentic leadership and its cross-cultural adaptability. In Malaysia at the International Islamic University over eighteen hundred staff participated in research conducted using the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ). The ALQ was also used in Turkey on a sample of over three hundred construction engineers and in China on over three hundred employees of Chinese companies located in three different provinces. In Eastern India three hundred and twenty-four executives participated in a study of managerial and leadership effectiveness using the ALQ. The results in these different settings indicated that authentic leadership had a significant impact on positive group performance. In the turbulent Middle East Carolyn Akhras conducted a case study on business leaders to determine (a) if they were perceived by their employees as authentic leaders, and (b) if they perceived themselves as authentic leaders. She concluded from her research the following: “In the Middle East and North Africa Area, the perceptions of authenticity are seen as the highest end of leadership.”⁵⁴

⁵³ Shamir and Eilam, “What’s Your Story?”, 403.

⁵⁴ Caroline Akhras, “Authentic Leadership in Drastic Times,” in *Proceedings of the European Conference on Management, Leadership and Governance*, ed. Dmitry Vasilenko and Natalia Khazieva (Academic Conferences and Publishing International, 2016), 6.

II. Discernment and the Desert Disciplines

The two questions Carolyn Akhras asked in her case study can only be answered correctly with proper insight and discernment, for not only is authenticity hard to define, it is also nearly impossible to assess. How does one perceive correctly and how does one differentiate between what is authentic and what is inauthentic? We often fail to recognize inauthenticity within ourselves, much less recognizing it in others. It was this concern voiced by Warren Bennis that became the catalyst for Bruce Avolio and his colleagues to begin looking at authenticity as a construct for leadership. Avolio mentioned nearly a decade later that his goal was “creating pathways” for further study and described his initial interest in authentic leadership as a “fork in the road.” How does one know which path to take when the road forks? These are critical questions for both leaders and followers and highlight the need for insight and discernment. Matta El-Meskeen emphasized the need for spiritual insight in order for Christian leaders “who walk ahead of their flocks” to be able to lead in such a way that “the flocks can follow a sure path.” He goes on to state how spiritual insight is attained: “by silence, retreat and long prayers,” and how it is not attained: “by action or study.” Discernment as both a personal quality and leadership skill is a necessary prerequisite for authenticity. It is developed in Christian leaders, according to Matta El-Meskeen, through the ancient spiritual disciplines practiced in the desert.

A. Spiritual Discernment

Nowhere is the topic of discernment more frequent in Church history than in the writings of the desert fathers.⁵⁵ Beginning with St. Antony, the father of desert monasticism, an understanding of discernment was developed and passed on from the *abbas* to their disciples. These disciples of the desert were taught that discernment was “the greatest gift of God’s grace.”⁵⁶ Spiritual discernment is the ability to differentiate between divine truth and error; between what is authentic and what is inauthentic. In his book *The Life of St. Antony*, Athanasius mentions this characteristic and how it was directly related to prayer and discipline: “Thus there is a need of much prayer and discipline, that when a man has received through the Spirit the gift of discerning spirits, he may have power to recognize their characteristics.”⁵⁷ Again the relationship is mentioned between prayer and discernment where Antony references Matt 7:22 and the importance of virtue over miraculous signs: “We ought always to pray, as I said above, that we may receive the gift of discerning spirits.”⁵⁸ As others followed Antony to the desert, “they marveled at the grace given to Antony from the Lord for the discerning of spirits.”⁵⁹ It was said that “the desert became a city” as a result of Antony’s example and

⁵⁵ Derwas Chitty, *The Desert a City* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Press, 1999), 27. “Certain aspects of this early Antonian and Pachomian literature may be noted in passing. In both, there is a great stress on *diakrisis*—discrimination.”

⁵⁶ G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware, eds., *The Philokalia* (London: Faber & Faber, 1995), 98.

⁵⁷ Athanasius, *Life of St. Anthony* (Wyatt North Publishing, 2011), Nook, 16.

⁵⁸ Athanasius, *Life of St. Antony*, 24.

⁵⁹ Athanasius, *Life of St. Antony*, 27.

influence; men and women adopted his lifestyle and practiced the disciplines “and the one purpose of them all was to aim at virtue.”⁶⁰ Antony had the special gift of spiritual insight and discernment and recognized the work of spiritual powers and forces at work in his own heart. His ability to teach others and encourage them in their battle is what attracted the multitudes. When the question was asked “what was the greatest virtue” a monk could possess to keep oneself from the devil’s harm, many offered their opinions and suggested fasting, vigils and poverty to keep the heart pure and refined. Antony offered this reply:

All that you have said is both necessary and helpful for those who are searching for God and wish to come to Him. But we cannot award the first place to any of these virtues; for there are many among us who have endured fasting and vigils, or have withdrawn into the desert, or have practiced poverty to such an extent that they have not left themselves enough for their daily sustenance, or have performed acts of compassion so generously that they no longer have anything to give; and yet these same monks, having done all this, have nevertheless fallen away miserably from virtue and slipped into vice. What was it, then, that made them stray from the straight path? In my opinion it was simply that they did not possess the grace of discrimination; for it is this virtue that teaches a man to walk along the royal road, swerving neither to the right through immoderate self-control, nor to the left through indifference and laxity.⁶¹

In the *Philokalia*⁶² discrimination and discernment are used interchangeably.⁶³

Those who lack the ability to discriminate or discern are those who fall away from the

⁶⁰ Athanasius, *Life of St. Antony*, 28. Purity of heart was the ultimate goal of the desert monks.

⁶¹ Palmer, Sherrard, and Ware, *Philokalia*, 1: 99.

⁶² “Philokalia,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, July 20, 1998, accessed February 18, 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Philokalia>. “*Philokalia*, (Greek: ‘Love of the Good, the Beautiful’), prose anthology of Greek Christian monastic texts that was part of a movement for spiritual renewal in Eastern monasticism ... first published in Venice in 1782 and gathered the unpublished writings of all major Hesychasts (hermits) of the Christian East, from Evagrius Ponticus to Gregory Palamas.”

⁶³ Palmer, Sherrard, and Ware, *Philokalia*, Glossary: DISCRIMINATION (*diakrisis*): a spiritual gift permitting one to discriminate between the types of thought that enter into one’s mind, to assess them

true and sure path. “Discrimination then is no small virtue, but one of the most important gifts of the Holy Spirit.”⁶⁴ The writer goes on to quote 1 Cor 12:8–10 using the word “discrimination” instead of “discernment.” The importance of this gift is stressed again as the writer continues:

You can see, therefore, that the gift of discrimination is nothing worldly or insignificant. It is the greatest gift of God’s grace. A monk must seek this gift with all his strength and diligence, and acquire the ability to discriminate between the spirits that enter him and to assess them accurately. Otherwise he will not only fall into the foulest pits of wickedness as he wanders about in the dark, but even stumble when his path is smooth and straight.⁶⁵

The importance of discernment in the writings of the fathers is highlighted in the numerous references found in the *Philokalia*. Ninety-nine times the terms discernment or discrimination are used, often by Antony, Evagrius, and John Cassian.

In the writings of late antiquity (from the second to the eight centuries), almost thirty percent of the teachings from this early monastic history are on the topic of discernment. No other concern caused more interaction between the abbot and the monastic or the elder and the novice.⁶⁶

John Cassian agrees with St. Antony on the central importance of discernment in the process of transformation and perfection. He calls this virtue *discretio*. “He elevates discretion above fasts, vigils, contempt of the world, even love and hospitality and insists

accurately and to treat them accordingly. Through this gift one gains ‘discernment of spirits’—that is, the ability to distinguish between the thoughts or visions inspired by God and the suggestions or fantasies coming from the devil. It is a kind of eye or lantern of the soul by which man finds his way along the spiritual path without falling into extremes; thus it includes the idea of discretion.

⁶⁴ Palmer, Sherrard, and Ware, *Philokalia*, 1: 98.

⁶⁵ Palmer, Sherrard, and Ware, *Philokalia*, 1: 98.

⁶⁶ Mary Margaret Funk, *Discernment Matters: Listening with the Ear of the Heart* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2013), 34.

that apart from discretion the good of all these practices and virtues will most certainly be lost. A lack of discretion can ruin all virtues.”⁶⁷

What Cassian adds to the discussion on discernment is the idea that the monk can only attain this virtue through obedience and submission to elders. “They can learn discretion only from one who has walked the path beforehand and has learned from the example of forbearers. True discretion lies imbedded in a tradition of discernment that must be learned from others.”⁶⁸ This characteristic of discretion, along with humility, obedience and patience are obtained through the practices of fasting, work, meditation on Scripture and prayer.

The *Apophthegmata patrum* (Sayings of the Fathers) is a collection of writings compiled in the latter part of the fifth century, and like the *Philokalia*, discernment [διάκρισις] is frequently mentioned. Discernment is linked increasingly with *logismon*, or evil thoughts and passions, rather than spirits. In the *apothegms* of the elders and in reference to the thoughts of *porneia* for example, the writer mentions “discernment is necessary for this *logismos*.”⁶⁹ Discernment became a virtue or tool for the monk, and its importance was in no way diminished as evidenced by its frequency in the writings. “It is the one virtue or ability which enables the others to flourish ... discernment is also a kind

⁶⁷ Philip Turner, “John Cassian and the Desert Fathers: Sources for Christian Spirituality,” *Pro Ecclesia* 13, no. 4 (2004): 481.

⁶⁸ Turner, “John Cassian and the Desert Fathers,” 482.

⁶⁹ Wortley, *Book of the Elders*, 87.

of superior insight, an ability to see beyond single rules and practices and comprehend the total effect of an action.”⁷⁰

Extreme and radical efforts in asceticism as the desert movement continued to grow required discernment to moderate excess. Disciples looked to elders for advice and guidance and elders passed along their experience and wisdom to newcomers. Disciples needed discernment to know which elder could be trusted and elders needed discernment in how to guide the young. One such elder who was sought out frequently and mentioned extensively in the *Apophthegmata* was Poemen. Known for his tolerance, moderation and empathy towards others, he became popular as a spiritual guide and earned the distinction throughout Egypt as “a shepherd of the flock.”⁷¹ In keeping with his predecessor Antony, Poemen listed “three great guides for the soul’s journey: vigilance, self-knowledge and discernment.”⁷² Like Antony he was known for his gift of discernment and passed on to his generation the sayings of those who preceded them. “The circle around him valued his compassion, his *penthos*, his moderation, his exegeses, his knack for teaching, and his “charism of word.” Most of all, that circle valued his memory, his habit of passing on the wisdom of a bygone age.”⁷³

⁷⁰ Joseph T. Leinhard, “On Discernment of Spirits in the Early Church,” *Theological Studies* 41, no. 3 (1980): 521.

⁷¹ William Harmless, *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 490.

⁷² Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 494; Benedicta Ward, trans., *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1975), 172, 35.

⁷³ Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 517.

According to Macarius who had spoken a word to Poemen in his younger years, remembering the words of the elders “provided a path of salvation.”⁷⁴ Not only did Poemen remember these words for his own salvation, he gathered and collected by memory the words of other elders including Antony to preserve and pass along. He was remembered two centuries later by the Bishop of Sakha, Zacharias, in a Coptic source titled *Encomium on John the Little*, as one who collected the wisdom of his predecessors.

Then, indeed, the great and discerning one, the great wise one, our holy father Abba Poemen, who became a new Paul in his generation, first of all in true wisdom narrated many achievements of many luminaries among our fathers, serving the wondrous works of the Holy Spirit that dwelt in our fathers in order to benefit our souls. Furthermore, the truly wise and all-holy Abba Poemen also wrote down many achievements of our father Abba John the Little.⁷⁵

St. Ignatius of Loyola understood discernment as motions of the soul and developed the *Spiritual Exercises* to better understand what he called times of desolation and times of consolation. His understanding of the interior movements in his own life were developed during a year spent in prayer and solitude in a cave in Manresa. “Ignatius spent the better part of a year in intense prayer and asceticism while begging for his meager support. He noted that God seemed to be treating him like a schoolboy, teaching him the most elementary notions of the spiritual life.”⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 515.

⁷⁵ Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 514. The admonition of Macarius to his disciple Poemen referred to the wisdom of the elders as a ‘path’ to be followed. This idea of succeeding generations following in the paths of those who preceded them is much closer to the Old Testament understanding of discernment. That this was initially done orally and by memory is also in keeping with the tradition of Old Testament wisdom.

⁷⁶ E. Edward Kinerk, “The Discernment of Spirits: An Ignatian Guide for Everyday Living,” *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 8, no. 2 (Fall 2008): 256.

It is believed that during his short time at Manresa, Ignatius wrote many of his notes that would later become the *Spiritual Exercises*. The purpose of the *Spiritual Exercises* is “to conquer oneself and regulate one’s life without determining oneself through any tendency that is disordered.”⁷⁷ This idea of conquering self is a recurring theme in the desert fathers and the purpose most often stated for ascetic practices. The exercises were written primarily for the spiritual director and not the practitioner, another recurring theme in desert spirituality. Discernment and victory over self and ego are done under the guidance and direction of a “spiritual father” and often in the context of community.

Henri Nouwen, contemporary writer and Catholic theologian, emphasized the importance of community in his book *Discernment: Reading the Signs of Daily Life*. Prayer, scripture reading and engaging with God’s people are the necessary ingredients for spiritual discernment. “Discernment grows out of the life of faith rooted in community.”⁷⁸ This may seem to go against the idea of solitude in the desert and the whole monastic movement beginning with St. Antony. A big argument against this movement is the way in which people isolated themselves from the Christian community and from society itself. The spirit of the desert fathers in solitude, however, was not isolation from community. Because of Antony, it was said, “the desert became a city”: “So their cells were in the mountains, filled with holy bands of men who sang psalms,

⁷⁷ Pamela Gebauer, “The Notion of Spiritual Discernment in the Writings of Origen, Antony of Egypt and Ignatius of Loyola: A Comparative Study” (Master’s thesis, Concordia University, 2000), 61.

⁷⁸ Henri Nouwen, *Discernment: Reading the Signs of Daily Life* (San Francisco: Harper One, 2013), 38.

loved reading, fasted, prayed, rejoiced in the hope of things to come, labored in almsgiving, and preserved love and harmony one with another.”⁷⁹

St. Symeon mentions that one of the purposes and goals of renunciation and virtue is for the community. “At the beginning of your renunciation of the world, try hard to implant in yourself noble virtues, so that you become useful to the community.”⁸⁰ St. Peter of Damaskus states that discernment is for the benefit of the community: “Through his devotion to God he will achieve spiritual insight and will begin to anticipate the snares prepared by the devil and his secret and stealthy attacks ... for this ability is a supernatural gift granted for the good of the community.”⁸¹

Irenée Hausherr discusses leadership within the desert community in his book *Spiritual Direction in the Early Christian East*. Spiritual direction and responsibility for the spiritual well-being of others was not a role taken lightly. Oftentimes this role was avoided, not so much because of the responsibility but because of the temptation to pride and the corruptive influence of power.⁸² Like the desert fathers of old, Matta El Meskeen avoided positional leadership and refused ordination to the point of locking himself in his cell. Hausherr discusses the qualities needed by the spiritual father and highlights the

⁷⁹ Athanasius, *Life of St. Antony*, 27.

⁸⁰ Palmer, Sherrard, and Ware, *Philokalia*, 4: 51.

⁸¹ Palmer, Sherrard, and Ware, *Philokalia*, 3: 244.

⁸² Irénée Hausherr, *Spiritual Direction in the Early Christian East*, translated by Anthony P. Gythiel (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1990), 125–26. “What stopped the old men when confronted with the prospect of having to assume the role of spiritual father was the fear of temptations against humility. In the Lives of the Saints there is no lack of examples of flight at being confronted with a multitude of disciples ... On numerous occasions, however, they preferred running away to jeopardizing their soul by taking care of another’s.”

importance of discernment for, among other reasons, the very real dangers of asceticism. “If a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit” (Matt 15:14).⁸³ The following statement agrees with the estimation St. Antony held for this important gift: “In the matter of direction the gift of *diakrasis* so greatly surpasses all others that it may be worth all of them; and especially that it may be the equivalent of a dispensation of age and of knowledge.”⁸⁴

Bill George highlights the importance of discernment in his book *True North* and gives the example of Jim Wallis, the founder of Sojourners. Wallis points out the difference between career and vocation. “Vocation is discerning your gifts and your calling. Your vocation is your True North, what you’re called to do.”⁸⁵ George also mentions the significance of discernment in processing and understanding crucible moments in a leader’s life, developing self-awareness and aligning with the purpose of the organization.⁸⁶

Ruth Haley Barton has authored numerous books on spiritual formation and Christian spirituality and has mentioned the growing interest in Protestant circles “to

⁸³ Bible quotations are taken from the NASB (1995) unless otherwise noted.

⁸⁴ Hausherr, *Spiritual Direction in the Early Christian East*, 81.

⁸⁵ Bill George, *Discover Your True North: Becoming an Authentic Leader*, 2nd ed. (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), Kindle, 3956.

⁸⁶ George, *Discover Your True North*, 1499. In the metaphor of the oyster pearl the question is asked, “Are you turning your wounds into pearls? To do so you will have to process your crucible, discern its meaning, and reframe it as an opportunity for personal growth.” Self-awareness is described as the starting point in every leader’s development and the most important capability for leaders to develop according to the advisory council of Stanford’s Graduate School of Business. “It is at the center of your inner compass and an essential component of knowing yourself, discerning your passions and discovering the purpose of your life,” 1802. Clarity to lead others, shift from *I* to *We* and aligning individual purpose with the organization’s purpose all require discernment. 3431.

embrace the classic spiritual disciplines” of silence, solitude, and prayer. “Many are discovering the desert mothers and fathers and the great Catholic authors who have kept these teachings alive for us,”⁸⁷ according to Barton. In her book *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership*, the importance of discernment in the Christian life is highlighted frequently and is found over one hundred and thirty times.

It is especially important for leaders to cultivate the ability to “discern the spirits” or “test the spirits to see whether they are from God.” A leader who is committed to paying attention at this level develops a mature capacity for discernment that helps him or her distinguish the real from the phony, the true from the false, in the world “out there” but also in the interior world of thoughts and motives.⁸⁸

Attentive listening, silence, solitude and prayer are just a few of the disciplines Barton highlights to develop discernment and keep the Christian leader grounded in the presence of God.

Solitude and silence in particular enable us to experience a place of authenticity within and to invite God to meet us there. In solitude we are rescued from relentless human striving ... in silence we give up control ... we listen for the still, small voice of God telling us who we really are ... then we are not quite so enslaved by the demands and expectations of life in leadership.⁸⁹

B. Disciplines in the Desert

Matta El Meskeen practiced the ascetic disciplines of the desert fathers. He began his monastic life in solitude and prayer in the desert of Fayoum. His initial goal was

⁸⁷ Ruth Haley Barton, “Make a Joyful Silence,” *Transforming Center*, February 5, 2009, accessed March 11, 2016, <https://www.transformingcenter.org/2009/02/make-a-joyful-silence/>.

⁸⁸ Ruth Haley Barton, *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership: Seeking God in the Crucible of Ministry* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2012), 67.

⁸⁹ Barton, *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership*, 28.

simply to give himself to God in prayer. Night vigils were a regular part of his discipline when he would read the sayings of the fathers and ask God for clarification and understanding. He “would emerge every night with a new friendship with the spirits of these saints; with a knowledge and illumination from them that grew every day.”⁹⁰ Abuna Matta highlights the importance of retreat in *Orthodox Prayer Life* in the chapter on “Holy Silence” as a primary means of clearing the clouds of sin and producing contrition and humility. “When you become well trained in solitude you will find precious occasions for practicing the presence of God and unveiling your soul before its Creator so as to repair every defect and default in it.”⁹¹ Retreat is mentioned along with silence as a discipline that will produce spiritual insight or discernment.

In an article titled “Asceticism and Purity,” Matta highlights a number of significant theological points that should be understood concerning ascetic practices and their purpose. No amount of suffering or training in spiritual discipline can in any way merit the forgiveness of sin or earn any other reward. Reliance upon the grace of God rather than personal ability and effort will prevent the feeling of pride and the temptation to compare or compete with others. Asceticism should not be so severe as to harm the body or prevent the normal function of daily activities. It should be practiced under the supervision of a spiritual mentor and begin at a level that is easily attained. Severity in

⁹⁰ John H. Watson, “Abuna Matta Meskeen: Contemporary Desert Mystic,” *Coptic Church Review* 27, nos. 3–4 (2006): 79.

⁹¹ Matta El-Meskeen, *Orthodox Prayer Life* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s, 2003), 200.

discipline increases slowly as the disciple progresses in grace and personal training. The end result is the ego and the death of self-will.

Ascetic disciplines are nothing more than the means to mortify the old Adam and crucify our will, our passions, and the desires that work in us for iniquity. *Ascesis* is only a way of showing our love and tender feelings toward God ... If ascetic discipline is devoid of love and joy in the Lord, it turns into a source of depression, sullenness, and perturbation.⁹²

Philip Turner, in his article “John Cassian and the Desert Fathers,” highlights the teaching of John Cassian and the emphasis on total renunciation of the self. Christ is to be imitated and is both an example and one who empowers the believer in the ascetic disciplines leading to transformation and perfection. Turner points out Cassian’s emphasis upon the grace of God and not human effort in this process.

Cassian insists upon the importance of prevenient grace and what might be called “assisting grace.” One can make no progress along the road to perfection without them. The necessity of grace is given even stronger emphasis in Book 12 of *The Institutes*. There it is God himself that gives the victory over vices that infect the soul.⁹³

The Olympic athlete is set forward as the example of one who is tried and tested as the believer is tried and tested by his own weaknesses and demonic influence. The Scriptures play a significant role in the process of transformation. “Meditation on the Holy Scriptures is indispensable for its acquisition, and so meditation on the sacred writings is to be the monk’s constant occupation.”⁹⁴

⁹² Matta El-Meskeen, “Asceticism and Purity,” accessed April 12, 2016, <http://www.spiritualite-orthodoxe.net/vie-de-priere/index.php/matta-el-meskeen-orthodox-teachings/asceticism-purity-matta-el-meskeen>.

⁹³ Turner, “John Cassian and the Desert Fathers,” 476.

⁹⁴ Turner, “John Cassian and the Desert Fathers,” 480.

Ascetic practices such as fasting and celibacy were present in third century Christianity, but it was the teaching of Origen that associated these practices with the pursuit of holiness and overcoming weaknesses in the flesh. Origen considered that purity of heart according to Matt 5:8 was possible through asceticism. Christ's victory in the wilderness and his statement in Mark 9:29 highlight the importance of fasting in overcoming the evil one. Christian virtue, according to Origen, grew in the heart that had been plowed by ascetic practices and the Scriptures provided the seed to then be sown in fertile ground, free from thorns and briers.

Permanent sexual abstinence had long been adopted by individuals [before Origen], while some practised more than others the common pieties of prayer and fasting. Origen popularized a vision which united these practices, together with radical poverty and Scriptural meditation, to locate them within a single interpretative frame and in a single lifestyle.⁹⁵

To what extent Origen's teachings had influenced Antony and other early Egyptian monastics is unclear, but it certainly provided a theological framework for what became a movement to the desert in a desire to attain perfection and holiness.

In reflecting on Moses's exodus journey, Origen had written that before the soul is perfected, it dwells in the desert "where it may be trained in the Lord's commandments, and its faith tested by temptations". Growing in virtue, the soul is led from one test to the next before it finally crosses into the promised land.⁹⁶

Origen is also seen to have a major influence on the monastic movement's concept of prayer. Along with Evagrius Ponticus, Origen "laid the foundations for a Christian

⁹⁵ Richard Finn, *Asceticism in the Graeco-Roman World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 104.

⁹⁶ Finn, *Asceticism in the Graeco-Roman World*, 104.

theology of prayer.”⁹⁷ Both men saw prayer as “turning one’s attention toward God” which had the effect of reversing the fall and bringing transformation. Hillary Case in her thesis titled “Becoming One Spirit: Origen and Evagrius on Prayer,” highlights the importance of attentiveness in the writings of these two men: “One of the main entrances to eternal life is prayer, the act of paying attention to God. Before prayer can be conversation with God, it must be paying attention, i.e., turning one’s heart toward God in obedience.”⁹⁸ This idea of attentive prayer is emphasized in the writings of the fathers and Christian mystics throughout church history. Henri Nouwen sums it up well and associates attentiveness with discernment:

The great movement of the spiritual life is from a deaf, nonhearing life to a life of listening ... living a spiritually mature life requires listening to God’s voice within and among us ... to discern means first of all to listen to God, to pay attention to God’s active presence, and to obey God’s prompting, direction, leadings and guidance.⁹⁹

Attentive listening is not a natural skill acquired without much effort, especially in our noisy, cluttered and busy world. Matta El Meskeen mentioned the need for silence, a discipline that goes along with solitude (retreat) and prayer for spiritual growth and nurtures the gift of discernment. According to Dallas Willard silence and solitude are necessary disciplines for self-awareness and knowledge of what the desert fathers called the self-ego. “In solitude we confront our own soul with its obscure forces and conflicts that escape our attention when we are interacting with others. Thus solitude is a terrible

⁹⁷ Hilary Case, “Becoming One Spirit: Origen and Evagrius Ponticus on Prayer” (Master’s thesis, College of St. Benedict/St. John’s University, 2006), 32.

⁹⁸ Case, “Becoming One Spirit,” 32.

⁹⁹ Nouwen, *Discernment*, 27–28.

trial, for it serves to crack open and burst apart the shell of our superficial securities.”¹⁰⁰

Donald Whitney in his book *Spiritual Disciplines* discusses the importance of silence in the life of the believer and mentions how uncomfortable Western culture is with this concept. He mentions the many biblical characters, both Old Testament and New Testament, who were shaped and strengthened through periods of silence and solitude. Matt 4:1 and 14:23, Mark 1:35, and Luke 4:42 are four examples given in the Gospels where Jesus withdrew for periods of silence and solitude. Whitney also mentions the writings of Jonathan Edwards, George Whitfield, David Brainerd, Hudson Taylor, C. H. Spurgeon, and Billy Graham where periods of silence and solitude had significant impact on the lives and ministries of these great leaders. A comparison is made by Whitney to the building of Solomon’s temple in 1 Kgs 6:7 with the building of our spiritual temple. “There was neither hammer nor axe nor any iron tool heard in the house while it was being built.” A. W. Tozer encouraged and practiced regular times of silence and solitude:

Retire from the world each day to some private spot, even if it be only the bedroom (for a while I retreated to the furnace room for want of a better place). Stay in the secret place till the surrounding noises begin to fade out of your heart and a sense of God’s presence envelopes you ... Listen for the inward Voice till you learn to recognize it. Stop trying to compete with others. Give yourself to God and then be what and who you are without regard to what others think ... Learn to pray inwardly every moment. After a while you can do this even while you work ... Read less, but more of what is important to your inner life. Never let your mind remain scattered for very long. Call home your roving thoughts. Gaze on Christ with the eyes of your soul. Practice spiritual concentration. All the above is contingent upon a right relation to God through Christ and daily meditation on the Scriptures. Lacking these, nothing will help us; granted

¹⁰⁰ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (New York: HarperCollins, 1988), 161.

these, the discipline recommended will go far to neutralize the evil effects of externalism and to make us acquainted with God and our own souls.¹⁰¹

Preston Busch in his thesis titled “Silence, Solitude, Prayer and Contemplation as Spiritual Disciplines Essential to Formation of Effective Preachers” highlights the importance of these disciplines in the life of the preacher. “To understand the biblical nature of the discipline of silence, one must think in terms of silence as anticipation.”¹⁰² Anticipation is expectation that God will speak and God will act. According to Busch silence is the proper response to the revelation of truth and the Person of Christ as well as the works of God and certain world events. Silence is one way to guard against sin and interior silence is the fruit of the righteous. “The righteous person can possess this inner silence and trust in God.”¹⁰³ The idea that one can study and prepare a message without first listening to God is arrogant presumption. Busch compares the importance of listening first and then proclaiming God’s message to the natural function of breathing in and breathing out.

The desert fathers held the conviction that their lifestyle was uniquely biblical and their flight to the desert was not an attempt to escape the responsibilities and/or temptations of the world. “The intent of this escape into the wilderness was to engage the

¹⁰¹ Donald Whitney, “Silence and Solitude ... For the Purpose of Godliness,” *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1991), accessed January 17, 2018, <http://biblicalspirituality.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/Silence-and-Solitude-For-The-Purpose-Of-Godliness.pdf>. Preston Busch, “Silence, Solitude, Prayer and Contemplation as Spiritual Disciplines Essential to Formation of Effective Preachers” (DMin thesis, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 2004).

¹⁰² Busch, “Silence, Solitude, Prayer and Contemplation,” 24.

¹⁰³ Busch, “Silence, Solitude, Prayer and Contemplation,” 40.

enemy, not to retreat from the enemy.”¹⁰⁴ The desert was considered the frontline of battle where creature comforts and worldly distractions were stripped away and the human heart was laid bare. “The desert is a good place because the devil cannot cover himself; here he is discovered.”¹⁰⁵

The tradition of the desert fathers and their way of life is perhaps best seen and understood through the persons and ministries of John the Baptist and the life of Christ.¹⁰⁶ The desert fathers, like John the Baptist, were voices crying out in the wilderness “with a message that few will embrace and many will reject. The solitary is a prophet who speaks a message that the world does not want to hear.”¹⁰⁷ St. Neilos the Ascetic in his “Ascetic Discourse” mentions John the Baptist as an example of one who left the city for the wilderness and attracted large crowds of people who came to hear his message and witness his lifestyle. “Let us avoid staying in towns and villages; it is better for their inhabitants to come and visit us. Let us seek the wilderness and so draw after us the people who now shun us, for Scripture praises those who leave the cities.”¹⁰⁸ St. Neilos goes on to speak of John’s clothing, shelter, bed and sleeping habits, among other

¹⁰⁴ Gerald L. Sittser, “The Battle Without and Within: The Psychology of Sin and Salvation in the Desert Fathers and Mothers,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 2, no. 1 (2009): 52.

¹⁰⁵ “The Light of the Desert Documentary on St. Macarius Monastery, Egypt,” posted by N Shenouda, June 10, 2013, accessed June 7, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_TWH7a1_Nr8&t=280s.

¹⁰⁶ Chitty, *Desert a City*, 14. In the Old Testament the prophets Elijah and Elisha are seen as examples of this lifestyle, along with Abraham who followed the biblical command to leave his country, his tribe and his father’s house for another land that God would show him.

¹⁰⁷ Jackie Bolen, “Silence and Solitude,” *City Desert: Desert Spirituality for the City*, 34, February 1, 2014, accessed April 15, 2016, <https://citydesert.wordpress.com/2014/02/01/>.

¹⁰⁸ Palmer, Sherrard, and Ware, *Philokalia*, 1: 214.

things, and the hardships he endured through the desert lifestyle. This lifestyle that the monks embraced was biblical according to their hermeneutic and believed to be effective in leading to purity and holiness.

Isaiah 40:3 is applied to John the Baptist in his ministry as a forerunner to Christ. According to the gospels John was sent as a witness to lead the people to repentance and prepare the way for the coming Messiah. Through humility and repentance the eyes of the people would be open to discern the fulfillment of the promise and the revelation of the Son of God. The desert fathers understood their retreat to the wilderness in much the same way as John was called to the desert. Renouncing the things of the world and preparing their hearts through repentance and faith for the coming of Christ, they practiced a strict ascetic life in order to purify the heart. Their lives of sacrifice and self-denial were meant to be examples to other believers. Spiritual insight was gained through the disciplines practiced in the desert and the benefit was enjoyed by each succeeding generation. Matta El Meskeen's spiritual life was formed in large part by both the sayings and the scriptures, and he has become to his generation a prophetic voice calling out in the wilderness.

In an article titled "Jesus the Ascetic," Simon Joseph makes the argument that the life and ministry of Christ fit in well with some of the ascetical elements of first century Judaism and mentions the significance of Jesus's time in the wilderness prior to the beginning of his ministry. The term *ascesis*, from the Greek ἄσκησις, refers to "training" or "exercise" in a particular course of instruction."¹⁰⁹ Asceticism includes not only the

¹⁰⁹ Simon J. Joseph, "The Ascetic Jesus," *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 8 (2010): 150.

exercises and disciplines, but also the location as well. The location of Jesus's forty days of fasting is a significant factor in his "training" or "testing." The Spirit drove him, or "impelled" him, into the wilderness immediately following his baptism. Mark's inclusion of the "wild beasts" only adds to the idea that the location was extreme and hostile. According to Burton-Christie in his article "The Work of Loneliness," the ancient monastics saw the experience of Christ in the wilderness as much more than symbolic. "To follow the monastic path was to follow Jesus, amplifying over the course of an entire life what Jesus experienced during his forty days in the desert."¹¹⁰ Throughout his ministry following this intense period of forty days fasting in the wilderness, Jesus would often withdraw from the crowds to a solitary place.

Within the desert setting itself, the monastic cell was a significant place necessary for spiritual formation. As Abba Moses once told a disciple, "Go sit in your cell, and your cell will teach you everything."¹¹¹ The cell became "the place for spiritual engagement ... and evolved into the area to fight personal demons of distraction and depression."¹¹² The importance of space and geography as being transformative is discussed in Darlene Hedstrom's article titled "The Geography of the Monastic Cell in Early Egyptian Monastic Literature." The cell was a physical structure representing the interior cell of the heart and ascetic disciplines practiced within this physical space were intended to lead the monastic to the interior space where God dwelt. After spiritual maturity was gained

¹¹⁰ Douglas E. Christie, "The Work of Loneliness: Solitude, Emptiness, and Compassion," *Anglican Theological Review* 88, no. 1 (Winter 2006): 35.

¹¹¹ Ward, *Sayings of the Desert Fathers* [Moses 6], 139.

¹¹² Darlene L. Brooks Hedstrom, "The Geography of the Monastic Cell in Early Egyptian Monastic Literature," *Church History* 78, no. 4 (December 2009): 759.

through training within the cell, the physical structure was no longer needed. The author asserts that the landscape of the desert was secondary in importance to the individual spaces located in it. This is an important concept and an assertion that agrees with the statement made by Sittser concerning God using any environment in the process of transformation. An individual cell could be just as effective whether in a city, a prison, a jungle or on the beach. Antony as the father of desert monasticism presents this model in stages as he moved progressively to more remote geographical locations throughout his life. Antony also stressed the importance of the cell: “Just as fish die if they are on dry land for some time, so do monks who loiter outside their cell ... so we should hasten back to the cell (like fish to the sea) lest while loitering outside we forget to keep a watch on the inner self.”¹¹³

The “cell” as a metaphor is taken up by Ron Rolheiser in his article “Lessons from the Monastic Cell” where he attempts to explain the significance of space and the danger of venturing outside of it. The principle gleaned from the desert fathers concerning the cell is not that social activity is harmful or that the monastic vocation is somehow better than another vocation. Rolheiser suggests that the cell refers to “duty, vocation and commitment.”

Go to your cell and your cell will teach you everything you need to know: Stay inside of your vocation, inside of your commitments, inside your legitimate conscriptive duties, inside of your church, inside of your family, and they will teach you where life is found and what love means. Be faithful to your commitments and what you are ultimately looking for will be found there. Every time you leave your cell you come back less a person: This is telling us that every time we step outside of our commitments, every time we are unfaithful, every time we walk away

¹¹³ Wortley, *Book of the Elders*, 42.

from what we should legitimately be doing, we come back less a person for that betrayal.¹¹⁴

Belden Lane, a Presbyterian minister and seminary professor, has spent many years studying and researching the importance of locality and geography on spirituality. In an article in *Christianity Today* he explains the reason why the monks chose the desert as a place to seek God and better understand the self. “The desert offers a marvelous laboratory for dealing with the self ... the terrain offers a marvelous antidote to the problem of the ego, the false self.”¹¹⁵ It is in the extreme environment of isolation and solitude that one is able to truly love, both self and others.

The monks learned that the desert teaches you how to live apart from others, how to live without compulsively needing them to give you worth or make you feel loved. In the desert, you learn how to live with yourself. Only then are you capable of giving love—sacrificial love that accepts or needs nothing in return.¹¹⁶

In his book titled *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes*, Lane describes his own inner longing for the desert and how he finds it in urban St. Louis. He answers the question of desert spirituality and how it can be transferable to the city. Though the desert environment is important in spiritual formation, Lane concludes “the practice of Christian discipline has never been limited to specific physical environments.”¹¹⁷ He mentions the cancer ward in

¹¹⁴ Ron Rolheiser, “Lessons from the Monastic Cell,” January 10, 2010, accessed March 5, 2015, <http://ronrolheiser.com/lessons-from-the-monastic-cell/#.Wh2MuLaZPBI>.

¹¹⁵ Belden Lane, “Anthony and the Desert Fathers: Discovering the Paradox,” *Christianity Today*, October 1, 1999, accessed March 4, 2015, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-64/antony-and-desert-fathers-christian-history-interview.html>.

¹¹⁶ Lane, “Anthony and the Desert Fathers.”

¹¹⁷ Belden Lane, *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes: Exploring Desert and Mountain Spirituality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 207.

hospitals, an AIDS hospice, the inner-city projects, and addiction treatment centers as some examples of “fierce landscapes” in urban environments.

C. Biblical Basis and Emphasis

Douglas Burton-Christie offers a compelling argument for the scriptural basis of the early monastic movement in his book titled *The Word in the Desert*. The inspiration and motivation for the withdrawal to the desert has been attributed to a number of factors including “a quest for knowledge, a flight from taxes, a refuge from the law, a new form of martyrdom, revival of an earlier Jewish ascetical movement, a rejection of classical culture and a response to a call from the Gospels.”¹¹⁸ The history of this movement is traced back to St Antony in the third century. Born into a wealthy family in Upper Egypt, his parents passed away when Antony was in his late teens. Left with a younger sister and the family inheritance, it was Antony’s responsibility to care for the estate and raise his sister. According to tradition he found himself meditating on the disciples who left all and sold all to follow Christ as he was walking to church on the Lord’s Day. It happened upon entering the church that day that the scripture was read from Matt 19:21: “If you wish to be complete, go *and* sell your possessions and give to *the* poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.” Feeling that the Word was directed at him, Antony went out that day and sold the family estate and gave the money to the poor, keeping only enough back to care for his sister. He moved outside the village and began a life of solitude, only seeking out others who could help him on his journey. He learned

¹¹⁸ Douglas Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 16.

from the scriptures the necessity of working with his hands according to 2 Thess 3:10 and adapted into his ascetic lifestyle the discipline of physical labor. “Antony of Egypt was to become known as the father and founder of desert monasticism.”¹¹⁹ It is significant to see how the scriptures played a vital part in the very beginning of this movement.

Benedicta Ward comments on the centrality of Scripture in the desert tradition in her article on “Spiritual Direction in the Desert Fathers”: “The language of the writings of the desert was so formed by the meditation of the Scriptures that it is almost impossible to say where quotation ends and comments begin.”¹²⁰

Scriptural meditation and memorization figured prominently in the desert movement and was a primary means, along with grace and discernment, for overcoming temptations.¹²¹ Macarius offered this advice to a young disciple struggling with his thoughts: “Meditate on the Gospel and on other Scriptures, and if a thought arises within you, never look at it but always look upwards, and the Lord will come at once to your help.”¹²²

A common problem in the desert was spiritual apathy, sadness and depression, known by the monks as *accidie*. The remedy for this condition, according to the desert

¹¹⁹ John Chryssavgis, “The Desert and the World: Learning from the Desert Fathers and Mothers,” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 53, nos. 1–4, (March 2008): 141.

¹²⁰ Ward, *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, 122.

¹²¹ Marilyn Dunn, *The Emergence of Monasticism: From the Desert Fathers to the Early Middle Ages* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 4. “The study and contemplation of Scripture played a fundamental part in his [Origen’s] concept of spiritual progress.”

¹²² Burton-Christie, *Word in the Desert*, 151.

fathers and mothers, was recitation of Scripture.¹²³ “Clearly Scripture was valued very highly in the desert, both as written and spoken word. It played an important role in the day-to-day life of the desert and was cherished for its authority, power and for its capacity to mediate God’s presence and protection.”¹²⁴

The significance of meditation and contemplation on Scripture in the desert tradition echoes the admonitions of Old Testament prophets and proverbs. The following advice was given to John Cassian by Abba Nestorus:

A speedy and effectual remedy [for your addiction to pagan learning] may arise if only you will transfer to the reading of and meditation upon the writings of the Spirit [Scripture], the same diligence and earnestness which you say you showed in those secular studies of yours.¹²⁵

John Chryssavgis translated the letters of Barsanuphius and John, two Egyptian monks living in seclusion near the ancient city of Gaza. These two men became popular in the early sixth century for their ascetic practices and their gift of discernment. What makes these letters so interesting today is their attention given to the “concerns of lay persons.”¹²⁶ Unlike the *Sayings* which were directed more toward the spiritual development of other monks, the letters of Barsanuphius and John deal with numerous issues including legal, economic, family and marital issues, health and illness, and social

¹²³ Burton-Christie, *Word in the Desert*, 153. “Amma Syncletica affirms this, claiming that in the fight against accidie, that kind of grief or deep sadness so common to the desert, the psalms are one of the main sources of healing.”

¹²⁴ Burton-Christie, *Word in the Desert*, 56.

¹²⁵ Burton-Christie, *Word in the Desert*, 79.

¹²⁶ John Chryssavgis, trans., *Barsanuphius and John: Letters, Volume 1*, The Fathers of the Church 113 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 8.

relations with Jewish and pagan neighbors. The advice offered through these letters concerning the issues of everyday life in sixth-century Gaza drew heavily from the Scriptures.

Barsanuphius and John cite profusely from the Scriptures ... Barsanuphius likes to adapt Scripture, both allegorically and spiritually, in order to respond to the particular needs of each individual. For him, as indeed for the monks at Scetis, the Word of God is a word of life. The list of scriptural passages quoted in this sixth-century document, whether directly or indirectly, is quite impressive.¹²⁷

Barsanuphius and John provided spiritual direction to many of different backgrounds and social standing, using Scripture to offer advice and prescribe healing and deliverance.

Abbot Seridos was one of their disciples and his leadership depended on submission to his elders, grace and discernment.

He considered himself not as an abbot but as a disciple of the Old Man. And as he became perfect in obedience ... the Old Man regarded him as a true son, and prayed to God to give him grace and discernment, which once obtained, permitted him with grace from above, to lead souls to life, to care for the afflicted, and to apply saving remedy, which is the word dictated by the Spirit.¹²⁸

D. Pentecostal Connection

Some of the early articles from Pentecostal periodicals and magazines highlight the importance of “desert disciplines” and discernment was often emphasized given the numerous manifestations, utterances, and ‘out-of-the-ordinary’ occurrences in Pentecostal services. An article in *The Latter Rain Evangel* in 1923 titled “The Secret of a Successful Ministry: God Calls Men First to Seclusion, Then to Service” highlights the

¹²⁷ Chrysavgis, *Barsanuphius and John Letters*, 10.

¹²⁸ Jennifer L. Hevelone-Harper, *Disciples of the Desert: Monks, Laity, and Spiritual Authority in Sixth-Century Gaza* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 55.

importance of solitude. The urgency of the harvest and the fields being already ripened does not mean that laborers can go out without preparation. Similar to the writings of the desert fathers, John the Baptist is set forth as an example of going into the wilderness first to hear from God and “receive his training for ministry.”

You and I are so busy today with our work ... too busy to hear the voice of the Lord, too busy to get away in the quiet of the wilderness, but beloved, the man who does not take the time to go into the wilderness, away from the rush of the world, is the man who will fail to hear the voice of the Lord pushing him forth and sending him on to reap.¹²⁹

Solitude is necessary for humility, discernment, and empowerment before service and ministry can begin according to the writer, who asks the question, “Will you hide away?” John the Baptist, Jesus and Paul the Apostle are all set forth as examples of those who were empowered for service after seasons of solitude.

In an article titled “The Sin of Talkativeness” written in 1915, Mary Hitchcock asks the Lord, “What is victory?” “The Holy Spirit began to show me some of the victories of Jesus that were counted defeat by the world. They were the victories won by SILENCE ... No man will win a race if he talks much! It is the silent man who wins.”¹³⁰

Reminiscent of the desert fathers, the article “Holy Silence” written by Otto Klink in *The Pentecostal Evangel* in 1935 begins and ends with the following admonitions:

“One of the greatest lessons we as the followers of the Lord Jesus Christ have to learn is

¹²⁹ Kelso Glover, “The Secret of a Successful Ministry: God Calls Men First to Seclusion, Then to Service,” *The Latter Rain Evangel*, December 1923, 6.

¹³⁰ Mary Hitchcock, “The Sin of Talkativeness,” *The Latter Rain Evangel*, December 1915, 21–22.

‘silence’ ... The giving out in constant talking without the taking in in silent prayer will mean a great loss to the inner life. Let us learn ‘holy silence in stillness.’”¹³¹

It’s not surprising to find numerous articles on discernment in early Pentecostal literature in the early twentieth century. *The Latter Rain Evangel* in 1911 included an article titled “Seducing Spirits” and highlighted the way Satan enters the mind through the imagination. This is called a “weak spot in the armor” and the individual is described as blinded by “strong delusion.” The spiritual condition and remedy given sounds a lot like the words of St. Antony: “The weak place in the psychical nature is the avenue through which Satan enters, and unless this is safeguarded by watching and prayer and the enemy rebuffed at the first suggestion, he stealthily gains ground.”¹³² Echoes of the desert fathers can be heard in *The Pentecostal Evangel* in 1929 and the advice given to an enquirer concerning the movements of God and discerning the difference between the divine and the flesh. Emphasis is given to purity, simplicity and the Word of God.¹³³

The Pentecostal movement came out of the Holiness movement in the late nineteenth century, the latter emphasizing sanctification as a second work of grace.¹³⁴

¹³¹ Otto Klink, “Holy Silence,” *The Pentecostal Evangel*, February 9, 1935, 2.

¹³² William Piper, “Seducing Spirits,” *The Latter Rain Evangel*, September 1911, 10.

¹³³ “How to Distinguish the Movements of God,” *The Pentecostal Evangel*, November 2, 1929, 13.

¹³⁴ According to Robins, “Pentecostalism sprang from a post-Civil War irruption of heroic Christianity known to historians as the American Holiness movement. Holiness had been a growing evangelical preoccupation since the rediscovery (and redefinition of John Wesley’s doctrine of ‘entire sanctification’ during the period of early 19th-century revivalism known as the Second Great Awakening.” R. G. Robins, *Pentecostalism in America* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2010), 1–2. According to Anderson, “The Holiness movement was a reaction to liberalism and formalism in established Protestant churches and stood for biblical literalism, the need for a personal and individual experience of conversion, and the moral

Early Pentecostals coming from this background had a deep longing for purity and earnestly sought a deeper and closer relationship with God. In the same way the central aim of the monk in the desert was purity of heart and the goal was union with God.¹³⁵ A significant characteristic of the Pentecostal movement is the eschatological promise of a new creation.¹³⁶ “The power of Pentecost as a conception or model is found precisely in its biblical roots. Pentecost is the promise of new Humanity. More than that, it is the promise of the new, restored creation.”¹³⁷

Beginning with St. Antony, the desert movement sought the restoration of man to his original condition. The consistent teaching of the desert fathers “is the recovery of Adam’s condition before the Fall. That is accepted as man’s true nature, man’s fallen condition being ‘unnatural.’”¹³⁸ “One of the principal themes of the desert fathers is that by living in utter simplicity and holiness, the monks were returning to the Garden of Eden, in harmony with both the natural world and its Creator.”¹³⁹

perfection (holiness) of the Christian individual.” Allen Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 25, 27.

¹³⁵ Chitty, *Desert a City*, 3.

¹³⁶ Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost spoke about the restoration of all things, prophesied by Joel, partially fulfilled in Jerusalem but still to come in the future (Acts 3:21). This would not only include a resurrection of the body but a restoration and renewal of all creation according to Romans 8.

¹³⁷ Howard Snyder, “The Pentecostal Renewal of the Church—A Biblical-Historical Inquiry into the Theme: Pentecost and the New Humanity,” paper presented at the Center for the Study of World Christian Revitalization Movements Consultation, Wilmore, KY, October 2009, 9.

¹³⁸ Chitty, *Desert a City*, 4.

¹³⁹ William Dalrymple, *From the Holy Mountain: A Journey Among the Christians of the Middle East* (London: Harper Collins, 1997), 295.

In her book *Pentecost in My Soul*, Edith Blumhofer highlights the ministry of Joseph and Helen Wannenmacher, early Pentecostal pioneers and Assembly of God pastors for over fifty years. According to Blumhofer, in the Wannenmacher's Pentecostal experience they "identified with the experiences of St. Francis de Sales, Brother Lawrence, Theresa of Avila, and the seventh-century French Quietist mystic Madame Guyon."

They perceived their Pentecostal spirituality as in a line with the spirituality represented by numerous saints, mystics, and devotional writers throughout church history, whom they paid tribute to for offering them incentive ... The Wannenmachers recognized their own roots in church history.¹⁴⁰

Wannenmacher quoted from these saints in his booklet titled *Is Jesus Christ in You?* Blumhofer mentions also that the writings of Madame Guyon "were popular in some early Pentecostal centers."¹⁴¹

An article in the *Pentecostal News* recently highlighted the forgotten legacy of T. K. Leonard and his significant contribution to the establishment of the Assemblies of God. He is credited with giving the Assemblies of God its name, the name of its publishing house and its first constitutional preamble and resolution. He helped to draft the Statement of Fundamental Truths "which remains the authoritative theological

¹⁴⁰ Edith Blumhofer, *Pentecost in My Soul: Explorations in the Meaning of Pentecostal Experience in the Early Assemblies of God* (Springfield, MO: Gospel, 1989), 173–74.

¹⁴¹ Blumhofer, *Pentecost in My Soul*, 174. Alice Luce was a prominent leader and influential in the early Pentecostal movement among Hispanics. "In her writings she cited the Catholic mystic Madam Guyon (1648–1717) and the Baptist missionary to Burma Adoniram Judson (1788–1850) with equal admiration."

statement for the Assemblies of God today.”¹⁴² For the first year of its existence the Assemblies of God headquarters was located in Leonard’s “Apostolic Temple,” an old bar and brothel that was purchased and renovated with funds acquired by the selling of his farm. In words reminiscent of St. Antony and his experience, Leonard stated that he believed the Lord “was pressing upon [me] to sell my possessions, consecrate myself, spirit, soul and body to the ministry of the Lord Jesus.”¹⁴³

An interesting and often overlooked observation in early Pentecostal history is the frequent attempts at communal living. The most famous community was located in Zion City, Illinois, and founded by Australian-born evangelist John Alexander Dowie. Others included Alma White’s “Zeraphath” in New Jersey, Frank Sanford’s “Shiloh” in Maine, and Thomas Gourley’s “Ballard Beach Commune” north of Seattle. Gourley believed that Pentecostals failed to follow Acts 2 in this respect. “When Pentecost fully comes to us ... we will live as those did to whom the faith was first delivered ... and all that believe will live together and have all things in common, and no one will call that which he possesses his own.”¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Ruthie Edgerly Oberg, “T. K. Leonard’s Spiritual and Social Vision: An Assemblies of God Founder’s Forgotten Legacy,” *Pentecostal Evangel News*, March 2, 2017, accessed September 4, 2017, <https://ifphc.wordpress.com/2017/03/02/t-k-leonards-spiritual-and-social-vision-an-assemblies-of-god-founders-forgotten-legacy/>.

¹⁴³ Oberg, “T. K. Leonard’s Spiritual and Social Vision.”

¹⁴⁴ James Goff, Jr., and Grant Wacker, eds. *Portraits of a Generation: Early Pentecostal Leaders* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2002), 155.

E. Summary

Originating from the study of transformational and charismatic leadership, authentic leadership represents one of the newest areas of leadership research. Bruce Avolio and his colleagues in looking at ways to develop authentic leadership asked the question: “What accelerated the development of leadership faster than your heretibility programme?” The literature coming out of their initial study identified the specific components of authentic leadership as self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, balanced processing and relational transparency. In addition to these four components, their model identifies positive psychological capacities, moral reasoning and critical life events as significant factors in the development of authentic leaders.

Discernment is a necessary characteristic and quality within the authentic leadership construct in order to determine what is authentic and what is inauthentic. It is an indispensable spiritual gift given to the church and an important characteristic of any Christian leader. Discernment figures prominently in the writings of the desert fathers and was believe to be developed through the ascetic disciplines practiced in the Eastern monastic communities. In practice and understanding, the desert, the disciplines and discernment were the desert fathers’ answer to what Avolio and his colleagues were asking as their primary research question: “What accelerated the development of leadership faster than your heretibility programme?” Matta El Meskeen emphasized the importance of spiritual insight, or discernment, and mentioned how it is attained for the Christian leader through the same disciplines practiced in the desert. “It is not possible to

obtain spiritual insight by action or study. Spiritual insight is attained by silence, retreat and long prayers in their various stages.”¹⁴⁵

The Pentecostal leader can benefit and learn from the life of Matta El-Meskeen and the desert fathers when the connection between the two movements is identified both biblically and historically. Many of the disciplines and practices found in the desert movement are also found in the literature of early American Pentecostals. The same yearning for holiness and desire for restoration, in terms of the spiritual gifts and of the New Creation (man in his original condition before the fall), were found in both movements. Discernment figured prominently in both movements as a necessary characteristic for the Christian leader to differentiate between what was authentic and inauthentic.

¹⁴⁵ St. Mina Monastery, “The Very Reverend Hegumen Father Matta El-Meskeen,” accessed May 14, 2015, <http://www.stmina-monastery.org/FrMatta/>.

CHAPTER 3:

A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP AND DISCERNMENT

“Can a man hide himself in hiding places so I do not see him?” declares the LORD.

—Jeremiah 23:24

The leader never lies to himself, especially about himself, knows his flaws as well as his assets, and deals with them directly.

—Warren Bennis

A sound biblical theology is the primary and foundational prerequisite for understanding Christian leadership and what it means for a person to be authentic. What does the Bible have to say about authenticity and how can the model developed by Avolio and his colleagues be understood in light of the teachings of Scripture. Are there examples in the Old and New Testament of leadership, both authentic and inauthentic, and its development that would include the basic components identified in the authentic leadership model? This chapter provides the normative construct in Osmer’s model of practical theology and answers the question, “What ought to be going on?” in light of the biblical and theological history. Matta El-Meskeen’s model of leadership will then be evaluated by these perspectives.

Biblical theology is story theology; it draws a line where systematic theology draws a circle.¹ Dr. Jim Hamilton defines biblical theology as “understanding and

¹ Rich Lusk, “What is Biblical Theology? Story Theology and a Theology of Story,” *Theologia*, 2004, accessed March 20, 2017, <http://horns.org/theologia/rich-lusk/what-is-biblical-theology>.

embracing the worldview of the biblical authors,” and highlights the need for the church and individual to understand “who we are in the story and how we enact our role in the outworking of its plot.”² This emphasis on story and narrative aligns with authentic leadership and the need for building self-awareness through understanding life-stories. “Biblical theology is theological reflection drawn from the historical analysis of acts of God reported in Scripture.”³ Reflection on the narrative of Scripture and the numerous acts of God and the characters presented forms a biblical worldview and understanding of who we are.

Foundational stories allow us to interpret and organize our experience, both corporately and individually. These basic stories define our past and provide a grid for mapping out future courses of action. Shared stories create social cohesion and give rise to community. Stories also embody an ethic, a praxis, a particular way of “being in the world.” The question “Who am I?” is essentially the question, “What’s my story?” As images of the story-creating, story-telling God, we inevitably give our life experiences narrative shape.⁴

This chapter is divided into two parts and begins with a framework for understanding authenticity in the context of leadership from a biblical perspective. The second part looks at the theology of discernment and how this theology has developed both biblically and historically through the writings of the Church Fathers.

² James Hamilton, Jr., *What is Biblical Theology: A Guide to the Bible’s Story, Symbolism and Patterns* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2014), 90.

³ Richard L. Pratt, “What Is Biblical Theology?” *Third Millennium Ministries*, accessed March 20, 2017, <http://thirdmill.org/seminary/lesson.asp/vs/BBT/ln/1>.

⁴ Lusk, “What is Biblical Theology?”

I. Authentic Biblical Leadership

The New Testament is full of warnings, from Jesus and the apostles, to beware of deception and what is false, or inauthentic. The strong tendency of the human heart to believe a lie is the result of self-deception from within, false teachers from without and has its origins in the work of Satan who disguises himself as an angel of light. The prophet Jeremiah (17:9) said, “The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?” Later in chapter 23, Jeremiah exposes the false prophets as those who proclaim a message from their own deceptive hearts rather than from the Lord. The result is they lead the people astray into a false sense of security despite their stubborn hearts. The remedy to deceptive and stubborn hearts is the proclamation of God’s word by authentic leaders who live out the values and responsibilities of the covenant.

A. Super Apostles

In 1 Corinthians 11 Paul defends his leadership against those who are “false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as servants of righteousness.” The Corinthian believers needed the ability to distinguish between the authentic apostle and those who were not genuine, or as Paul sarcastically called them “super-apostles.” In his defense Paul “boasts”⁵ of his credentials and reminds them of the intimate relationship they share together.⁶ He compares their situation to that of Eve in the garden and the

⁵ He does this reluctantly and repeats often the foolishness of boasting.

⁶ R. L. Omanson and J. Ellington, *A Handbook on Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993). Paul considers himself to be like a father to the Christians of Corinth (see 1 Cor 4:15), a father who keeps a watchful eye on his daughter who has been promised in marriage.

deception of the serpent and stresses they are in a similarly dangerous situation. Tares are being sown among the wheat, and the Corinthian believers are being led astray by “another Jesus, a different spirit, and a different gospel.” Exploitation and coercion for selfish ambition characterize the inauthentic leadership of the false apostles.⁷

Their gospel allows for self-boasting and arrogance. It also gives them a warrant for assuming spiritual authority to lord it over others and to berate those who take the role of a humble servant. This gospel apparently places greater emphasis on human standards as valid criteria for evaluating others, on rhetorical showmanship, on racial heritage, and on ecstatic visions.⁸

This is indicative of what the authors in Ladkin and Spiller highlight as a potential danger within the self-awareness component; individualist centrist leadership as opposed to authenticity within community and a more collectivist approach.⁹ Paul, on the other hand, demonstrates what Taylor emphasized about authenticity and the need for vulnerability and self-exposure within the context of relationship.¹⁰ Relational transparency is seen in Paul’s humility and willingness to admit his weaknesses. His refusal to be compensated financially for his service to the Corinthian Church should be to his credit and not in any

⁷ David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, The New American Commentary 29 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman 1999). The opponents came with eloquence, a swaggering boldness, and persuasive words that proclaimed a testimony about themselves rather than Christ.

⁸ Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 464.

⁹ Donna Ladkin and Chellie Spiller, “Introduction: Authentic Leadership: Clashes, Convergences, and Coalescences,” in *Authentic Leadership: Clashes, Convergences and Coalescences*, ed. Donna Ladkin and Chellie Spiller (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2013), 13. “The idea of community is not new to authentic leadership theorizing ... for instance, George and Sims (2007, p. xxxi) suggest shifting orientation from an individualistic to a more collectivistic one as a basis for authentic leadership.”

¹⁰ Ladkin and Spiller, “Introduction,” 12. “Taylor opens with the notion that two aspects are vital to the experience of authenticity within leadership relations; first there must be some kind of self-exposure and vulnerability present; and second, that self-exposure must be enacted within the context of a relationship.”

way undermine his credibility. Self-humiliation for the exaltation of others goes against the cultural norms of Corinthian life but remains true to the spirit of the gospel.¹¹ What these false teachers promoted appealed directly to the carnal desires and natural inclinations of fallen man—”a Christianity that was dismissive of taking up the cross and weakness and suffering.”¹² Authenticity must align with the institutions and organizations where leadership occurs, and in this case with Jesus himself who emphasized the centrality of suffering through his life and message. Paul reluctantly “boasts” of his spiritual and ethnic heritage but understands his true identity as a servant of Christ. His identity is authenticated by the sufferings he endured.

Paul turns convention on its head and argues for the authenticity and superiority of his apostolic service from his weaknesses, not from his strengths. Double foolishness. Holy foolishness! The apostle begins with a generalized statement of his sufferings—“with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death” (v. 23). He pictures a life overflowing with perpetual, incalculable sufferings. This was Paul’s claim to authenticity. Certainly, none of the super-apostles could match it, and more certainly, none cared to.¹³

The numerous critical life events listed at the end of the chapter reinforce Paul’s argument in support of his “authenticity.” The use of the word “disguise” in this chapter

¹¹ David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, The New American Commentary 29 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman 1999), 474. “His refusal to accept any subsidy from them is not intended to dishonor them in some way but to honor them and, we might add, Christ. It remains hard for the Corinthians to comprehend why he would voluntarily accept humiliation for their sake and how his humiliation leads to their exaltation. This failure to comprehend why he would do this reveals a failure to understand their apostle fully, but, more seriously, a failure to understand the gospel that exchanges self-exaltation for self-sacrifice in service to others. They also fail to understand the paradox that God’s power becomes perfect in humiliation and weakness. Their basic problem is that they have allowed the values of their culture to shape their understanding of the faith and community practice, and they lack the knowledge of God that exposes those values as foolish.”

¹² R. K. Hughes, *2 Corinthians: Power in Weakness* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2006), 195.

¹³ Hughes, *2 Corinthians*, 195.

in referring to these super-apostles and to Satan highlights the importance of spiritual discernment.¹⁴ If their end is destruction, they will lead those who follow them to the same unfortunate end.

B. Scribes and Pharisees

Those who held positional leadership in Israel during Jesus's life and ministry were the scribes and Pharisees. Paul's reluctance to boast in 2 Corinthians 11 can be better understood in the light of Jesus's teaching in Matthew 23 and the hypocrisy of these religious leaders. Much like the super-apostles, self-promotion and exaltation characterized this group as well. Their ambitious desire for recognition and praise is highlighted, condemned and used as a context for defining true kingdom leadership. Humility is valued over self-promotion and service is valued over lordship. Jesus's words—*The greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled and whoever humbles himself will be exalted* (23:11–12)—were to be a lesson to his disciples in their preoccupation with position, power and greatness. The indictment against these false teachers is stated immediately as Jesus begins his discourse: They teach others to do what they don't do themselves.

¹⁴ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1963). They put on a σχῆμα, an outward form or fashion that makes them look like "apostles of Christ." They do not have the μορφή, the form that is native to the essence, the form which all true apostles of Christ have. Their own μορφή they dare not display, for then all Christians would run from them. So they put on a mask and thereby transform themselves into apostles of Christ.

Credibility is essential to leadership and is established when words and deeds are congruent; the leaders' actions are consistent with their words.¹⁵ This tends to be the primary method that people use to determine another's credibility.¹⁶ "People listen to the words and look at the deeds. Then they measure the congruence. A judgment of "credible" is handed down when the two are consonant."¹⁷

The scribes and Pharisees had positional authority to preach and teach the law but were unwilling and unable to practice what they preached. They lacked both integrity and transparency and thus disqualified themselves by their actions.¹⁸ St Gregory the Great in his book *The Pastoral Rule* acknowledged the presence of these same type of leaders in the sixth century Church.

There are some also who investigate spiritual precepts with cunning care, but what they penetrate with their understanding they trample on in their lives: *all at once they teach the things which not by practice but by study they have learnt*; and what in words they preach by their manners they impugn. Whence it comes to pass that when the shepherd walks through steep places, the flock follows to the precipice ... for certainly no one does more harm in the Church than one who has the name and rank of sanctity, while he acts perversely.¹⁹

¹⁵ Bill George, *Authentic Leadership: Rediscovering Secrets to Creating Lasting Value* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 75. "When leaders preach one thing and practice another, commitment is quickly lost and employees become doubly cynical."

¹⁶ James Kouzes and Barry Posner, *Credibility: How Leaders Gain and Lose It, Why People Demand It* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011), 32.

¹⁷ Kouzes and Posner, *Credibility*, 32.

¹⁸ Hearing and doing, listening and obeying are inseparable and necessary components of Scriptural teaching, both in the Old Testament and New Testament. Jesus ended his Sermon on the Mount with an emphasis on the foolishness of hearing His words but not doing them. The same emphasis can be seen in the desert fathers and the importance placed on *praxis*.

¹⁹ Gregory the Great, *The Book of Pastoral Rule*, trans. George E. Demacopoulos (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2007), 2 (emphasis original).

Credibility is earned and sustained through disciplines practiced and this includes the component of self-awareness.²⁰ Jesus referred to these teachers as “blind guides,” “blind fools,” and “blind men,” unable to see themselves and discern their own hypocrisy. The condition of their heart was revealed by their true motivations and desires; to be seen by others and honored for their position.²¹ They were not being authentic because authenticity is not impression management or self-monitoring. “The authentic person is one who relies on internal information and values rather than external circumstances and pressures to determine behavior and actions” (chapter 2, page 3). Peter was guilty of self-monitoring and impression management in Galatians 2 when he was confronted by Paul over the issue of Gentile fellowship. His behavior with the Gentiles changed due to external factors when “certain men” from Jerusalem arrived. The danger of inauthentic leadership can be seen in the way others quickly followed. Their motivation, much like the scribes and Pharisees, was the fear of others.

But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For prior to the coming of certain men from ^aJames, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he *began* to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision. The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy. (Gal. 2:11–13)

²⁰ Kouzes and Posner, *Credibility*, 35, 42. “To be a good leader you need to know who you are, your values as a person and how best to use these values in every interaction. Without knowing who you are, you cannot lead with integrity.”

²¹ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961). This show before men was naturally combined with the desire to impress men and to have these prove it by greatly honoring such holy men.

The scribes and Pharisees were actors on a stage according to Jesus's assessment and condemned in the strongest terms for their hypocrisy.²² Warning was given elsewhere to His followers in Matt 16:11–12 to beware of this leaven referring to the teaching and hypocrisy of the religious leaders. Paul used the same reference in Gal 5:9 to highlight the danger of false teaching and false teachers permeating and corrupting the whole church. In his denunciations in Matt 23:13–36, Jesus highlights and reveals the stark contrast between the outward actions and the inner reality of these leaders. Priority should be given to cleaning the inside of the cup in order for the outside to be clean also; the outer appearance should naturally flow from an inner reality. The determination to hide the inner reality is an indication of inauthenticity (see note 8).

Titles should not be sought for privilege or status and used as a means of self-exaltation.²³ Jesus does not prohibit the use of rabbi, father or teacher when referring to others in leadership, but rather warns against the unholy desire for recognition and respect that comes from the positions these titles confer.²⁴ Pride is perhaps the greatest danger in leadership and positions of authority and the primary reason why the monks

²² M. A. Powell, ed., *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 2011). The Greek word *hypokritēs* (transliterated into English as “hypocrite”) was used to denote an actor, one who performed behind a mask. Thus the basic connotation of “hypocrisy” involved pretense or insincerity (putting forward an outward appearance that does not comport with one’s true self).

²³ Gregory, *Book of Pastoral Rule*, 121. Gregory, when describing the term *episcopus*, wrote “that it is a title denoting work, not dignity.” This work involves ‘overlooking’ or taking care of the Church. “To exercise the office of a bishop is to overlook; so that one who delights to be over others and not to profit them may understand that he is no bishop.”

²⁴ John Peter Lange and Philip Schaff, eds., *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Matthew* (1862; repr., Bellingham: Logos Bible Software, 2008). The Savior prohibits not so much the titles themselves, as the spirit of pride and ambition which covets and abuses them, the haughty spirit which would domineer over inferiors, and also the servile spirit which would basely cringe to superiors.

refused titles and clerical positions within the church.²⁵ Survey results from Lausanne in 2010 indicate that Jesus's teaching in Matthew 23 needs to be heeded by Christian leaders today. One thousand respondents to the survey listed pride as the number one characteristic Christian leaders exhibit when dealing with staff and parishioners.²⁶ Pride is the fruit of those who think too highly of themselves and lack self-awareness. The leader's self-awareness should reveal both strengths and weaknesses, which results in an ability to be open and honest about personal inadequacy while at the same time recognizing strengths in others. Pride, however, is threatened by personal weakness and minimizes the strengths of others.

The first action these religious leaders were guilty of in Matthew 23 was laying on the shoulders of the people a burdensome weight that they could not bear. The hierarchical leadership structure in the religious institution of the day maintained a clear separation between "clergy" and "laity." The former held the key of knowledge for salvation and the latter were at their mercy. Based upon the first denunciation, or "woe" that Jesus uttered, this key was used to lock rather than open the door.²⁷ Jesus on the

²⁵ The monastic communities were often used as stepping-stones to positions of leadership within the institutional church because bishops were chosen from among the monks.

²⁶ Jane Overstreet and Lausanne Leadership Development Group, "We Have a Problem!—But There Is Hope—Results of a Survey of 1000 Christian Leaders from Across the Globe," *Lausanne Movement*, 2010, accessed February 17, 2018, <https://www.lausanne.org/content/we-have-a-problem-but-there-is-hope-results-of-a-survey-of-1000-christian-leaders-from-across-the-globe>. The most frequent response when leaders were asked, "From the list below choose up to five of the most pressing issues facing Christian leaders in your nation," was "personal pride" followed by a "lack of integrity."

²⁷ Stuart K. Weber, *Matthew*, Holman New Testament Commentaries 1 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000). The primary tool by which the hypocrites kept people out of the kingdom was their own example: You do not enter yourselves. They led evil lives, and the people followed them.

other hand sought to destroy this separation and hierarchy and turn the institution upside down. His message to the people was quite different in Matt 11:28–30.

Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.
Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.

The leadership of Jesus flowed from an inner reality of meekness and humility and offered a relationship to others without distinction or discrimination.²⁸ Followers were encouraged to learn from him and take from him, not simply his words and actions, but his character and personality. Paul invited believers in the churches he planted to do the same.²⁹ This approach highlights the authentic leadership model, relational by nature and characterized by trust and transparency (chapter 2, note 35). The hierarchical leadership created within institutions relies on positions and titles and tends to separate and discriminate.

C. Timothy and Epaphroditus

Paul begins Philippians 2 with an admonition to the church to live together in unity, love each other unselfishly and put others' interests first. "Working together with one mind and purpose" in humility and without "self-monitoring" or "impression

²⁸ Bill George, *Discover Your True North: Becoming an Authentic Leader* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), Kindle, 4709. George highlights the importance of humility and empathy, especially as it relates to global leadership. "Empathy is the ability to walk in someone else's shoes. This requires humility and the capability to engage people from different cultures personally, rather than standing back and judging them. Empathy builds rapport and bonding and creates lasting relationships."

²⁹ 2 Thess 3:7–9. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you, nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we *kept* working night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you; not because we do not have the right *to this*, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, so that you would follow our example. 1 Corinthians 11:1 Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.

management” is Paul’s description of genuine authentic Christian community. Jesus is set forth as the ultimate example of unselfish giving, serving and humbling himself for the good of others in what is known as *kenosis*, or “self-emptying.” Some theologians describe *kenosis* not so much as an act of God but as the very essence of God.³⁰ When God revealed Himself ultimately to man through Jesus Christ, He revealed who He is in essence and nature as much as what He does in action. *Kenosis*, then, is the very nature and essence of God. It is who He is authentically and genuinely. The act of obedience to death on the cross, something unimaginable to a Roman citizen, is the essence of *kenosis* and is contrasted with those Paul refers to in Phil 3:18 as the “enemies of the cross.” This then differentiates those who are genuine followers and those who are false teachers. The shame and suffering of the cross is embraced by those who truly have the essence of a new nature, the very nature of God dwelling within. The fruit of this new nature is what Paul described at the beginning of the chapter—unity, love, humility and unselfishness. It goes against the very nature and essence of fallen man.

One of the strongest characteristics of our fallen nature is selfishness. The one desire of an unregenerate man is to gratify self. Even those actions in which he seems to have most respect to God or to his fellow-creatures, will, if carefully examined, and weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, be found to have self for their principle, and self for their end. This disposition being so deeply rooted in the heart, we cannot but expect that it

³⁰ Hani Hanna, “The Historicized Christology of Karl Barth and Mattá al-Miskīn: A Comparison for the Sake of Ecumenical Renewal” (PhD diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 2013), 255. Hanna highlights Matta’s theology on the incarnation and his understanding of *kenosis* as “that of identity insofar as the condescension, which we see in the incarnation, belongs to the essence of God the Son. In other words there is *kenosis* in God Godself,” 252. “Matta’s view of *event* is grounded in Christology insofar as Christ is the unity of deity and humanity and therefore is definitive *event* or *reality*. As such the dynamic of authentic *event* is that of *kenosis*, or self-emptying—or self-giving, as Matta sometimes calls it. *Kenosis* is the dynamic of authentic event, in which the spiritual aspect grounds and moves towards the material aspect, which in turn manifests the spiritual.”

should operate to a certain degree, even after the evil of it is discerned, and after its allowed dominion has ceased.³¹

Timothy and Epaphroditus are then presented at the end of the chapter as examples of what Paul encourages at the beginning and what Jesus demonstrated through *kenosis*.

The relationship Paul had with Timothy is described a bit differently than that of Epaphroditus, but both relationships are in the context of leadership, or service to the church. With Timothy Paul described a father/son relationship and Epaphroditus is described more as a colleague/coworker relationship. Both benefited from the leadership of Paul and the example he set in ministry, and both were highly commended for their unselfishness and concern for the Philippian church. They naturally came to Paul's mind as examples of what he had been writing about and were a stark contrast to the "enemies of the cross" he would mention in the next chapter. These latter were "evil workers," self-centered, self-serving and set their mind on earthly things. Timothy and Epaphroditus, however, put the needs of the church ahead of their own safety and well-being. Under moral reasoning in the Authentic Leadership model, the individual leader shows "a willingness to promote the greater good above selfish interest or personal benefit" (chapter 2, note 34). The decision-making process is based upon moral judgment of right and wrong, not on what is most advantageous or safe to the leader. Paul's decision to send these two meant certain inconvenience and loss for himself as his situation was uncertain, yet their departure would be to the benefit of the Philippian church. Timothy was of value to Paul as a son to a father, and his conduct was consistent with the teaching

³¹ C. Simeon, *Horae Homileticae: Philippians to 1 Timothy*, vol. 18 (London: Holdsworth & Ball, 1833), 50.

he had learned.³² They shared together a common concern for the believers in Philippi and considered the welfare of the church above their own.³³ This was ultimately the primary concern of Christ Jesus (2:21), so Paul and Timothy were simply modeling *kenosis* and giving themselves sacrificially as Christ had done for them. Authentic leaders develop relationships where the emphasis is on follower development and the objectives are commonly shared (chapter 2, note 35). Epaphroditus, commended by Paul for the same characteristic, was willing to suffer personal loss for the benefit of others. As a colleague and coworker, Paul was not threatened by Epaphroditus and highly praised him for his example of unselfish service.

Paul's incarceration under Roman guard was certainly a deep concern for the Philippian church and his welfare a cause for anxiety and fear among the believers. Throughout this letter Paul's optimism that things will work out for good, the gospel will continue to go forth and he will eventually be freed to visit the Philippians is clearly evident. Under positive psychological capacities, Paul's words demonstrate what the authentic leader displays; confidence, hope, optimism and resiliency.

³² Paul mentions this consistency in 2 Tim 3:10 when he writes, "You followed my teaching and conduct." It was Paul's message to the Philippian believers as well not only to follow his words but imitate his conduct. "The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you (4:9)."

³³ A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman, 1933). Timothy is described as 'likeminded' in the KJV and 'of kindred spirit' in the NASB. The Greek word is ἰσοψυχον and used only here in the New Testament; *isos* meaning, equal, consistent, genuine and *psuche* meaning mind, soul, spirit. Old, but very rare adjective (ἴσος, ψυχή [*isos, psuchē*]), like ἰσότης [*isotimos*] in 2 Pet 1:1—"a faith of the same kind...".

D. John the Baptist

Ravi Zacharias in a recent podcast highlighted the mass movements in world history and mentions how often they were started by an individual, whether for good or evil.³⁴ He quotes from *Filled With The Spirit* written by Richard Ellsworth Day:

It would be no surprise if a study of secret causes were undertaken to find that every golden era in human history precedes from the devotion and righteous passion of some single individual ... there are in one sense no bona fide mass movements. It may look that way. At the center of the column there is always one person who knows God and knows where God is going.³⁵

Ravi goes on to mention John the Baptist and the methods God used to shape such leaders. Quoting an unknown source, he reveals the pathway to becoming that person that God chooses and uses.

When God wants to drill a man and thrill a man and skill a man, when God wants to mold a man to play the noblest part, when he yearns with all his heart to create so great and bold a man that all the world might be amazed, watch His methods, watch His ways. How He ruthlessly perfects whom He royally elects. How He hammers and hurts him, with mighty blows converts him.³⁶

In contrast to Tiberius Caesar and the long list of politicians and religious leaders of the day given in Luke 3:1–2, God’s chosen leader was an unknown ascetic in the wilderness.³⁷ The extreme environment of the wilderness was John’s home for much of

³⁴ Robert Quinn, *Deep Change: Discovering the Leader Within* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996), chapter 2, note 21.

³⁵ Ravi Zacharias, “God Will Use You, Don’t Underestimate What You Can Do” (video), accessed February 20, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6UcmNENYveo>. Robert Quinn’s argument in *Deep Change* highlighted the individual’s potential to effect significant change in an organization or institution (chapter 2, note 21).

³⁶ Zacharias, “God Will Use You.” Quoting from an unknown source, Ravi Zacharias mentions the pathway to becoming that person that God chooses and uses.

³⁷ Commended by Jesus as “one who is more than a prophet” and a man highly esteemed by the

his life and some theologians believe he lived among the Essenes or a similar desert community.³⁸ Away from the comforts of civilized society this Jewish community of desert dwellers believed their flight to the wilderness was not escapism but the only way to remain faithful to the covenant and ready for Messiah's coming.³⁹

They were ruled by an elaborate hierarchy of officers and councils and guided by a detailed set of rules based on biblical law. Numerous practices were peculiar to this sect. Property was held in common, celibacy was practiced, a high state of ritual purity was maintained, economic and social relations with nonmembers were greatly restricted, and admission to full membership was preceded by three years' probation.⁴⁰

desert fathers and the monastic communities throughout church history for his asceticism, character and devotion. Simon J. Joseph, "The Ascetic Jesus," *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 8 (2010): 149. "The world of first century Judaism had distinctly ascetical elements. Indeed an established 'tradition of asceticism' was in place by the time Jesus was born." John Cassian, *The Conferences*, ed. Boniface Ramsey, Ancient Christian Writers Series 57 (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1997), 6:522. The monks were "imitating John the Baptist, who passed all his life in the desert, and Elijah and Elisha." Claudia Rapp, "Desert, City and Countryside in the Early Christian Imagination," *Church History and Religious Culture* 86, no. 1 (June 1, 2006): 98–100. "The Christians who retreated to the desert ... modeled themselves after the prophets, especially Elijah and Elisha, and after John the Baptist ... the prototype ... who is frequently called 'a citizen of the desert'."

³⁸ W. A. Elwell and B. J. Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988). Some scholars have suggested that John might have been adopted as a boy by the Essenes (as was their practice) at Qumran and reared in their wilderness community, adjacent to the Dead Sea and near the Jordan River.

³⁹ In a similar way the monks who fled to the desert saw their departure from a corrupt society as a necessity. John H. Watson, "Abuna Matta Meskeen: Contemporary Desert Mystic," *Coptic Church Review* 27, nos. 3–4 (2006): 68. "Leaving the world for wasteland can be perceived as saving the world within oneself, and saving the wider world itself within the prayer life of eremitism and monasticism." Lawrence Cunningham, ed., *Thomas Merton, Spiritual Master: The Essential Writings* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1992), 278. "The Coptic hermits who left the world as though escaping from a wreck, did not merely intend to save themselves. They knew that they were helpless to do any good for others as long as they floundered about in the wreckage. But once they got a foothold on solid ground, things were different. Then they had not only the power but also even the obligation to pull the whole world to safety to safety after them."

⁴⁰ A. J. Saldarini, "Essenes," in *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed., ed. M. A. Powell (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 259.

Their primary concern was “purity and holy minds”⁴¹ and the disciplines of scripture recitation and memorization along with prayer and meditation ordered their daily lives. The monastic communities centuries later would share this primary concern and would adopt similar disciplines and practices for their life in the desert. The monks saw this lifestyle as authentically biblical through the lives of Elijah, Elisha, John the Baptist, and Jesus. The authenticity of the message of John the Baptist was attested by Jesus, received by the common people but rejected by the religious leaders of his day. This put John in good company as an authentic leader since the Lord’s messenger throughout the Old Testament was often rejected and persecuted by the religious and political leaders. Persecution was also a badge of honor for early Pentecostals as it put them in genuine fellowship with the early church.⁴²

E. The Good Shepherd

The shepherd was a familiar figure in both the Old and New Testament and best represented authentic spiritual leadership. Jesus called Himself the Good Shepherd and often viewed the people as “sheep without a shepherd.” His words were a condemnation

⁴¹ Elwell and Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia*, 720.

⁴² Catalin Negru, *The History of the Apocalypse* (Lulu.com, 2015, Kindle), 1158–1159. “The early Pentecostals were severely criticized ... the ostracism did not quench the zeal and the activism of the Pentecostals ... All the sects persecuted for their religious aberrations, including Pentecostalism, have conveniently transposed themselves into the role of the early Christian church persecuted by the pagan Romans ... The Pentecostals alienated themselves from the decayed society and dedicated their lives to prepare for Christ’s return.” Otto Klink, “Persecutions,” *The Pentecostal Evangel*, March 2, 1940, 6. Persecution was a sign of authenticity and had its benefits in the purity and proclamation of the gospel. W. C. Hoover, “Apostolic Power Brings Apostolic Persecution,” *The Latter Rain Evangel*, February 1921, 14. Describing the revival in Santiago Chile and the threats from both political and religious leaders, Hoover writes, “The Lord was working in apostolic power and we were also having a taste of apostolic persecution.”

to the religious leaders who were responsible for the well-being and care of the people but were consumed with their own ambition and selfish gain. Following the resurrection in John 21, Jesus's conversation with Peter highlighted the type of pastoral ministry required in the church; a ministry based upon genuine love and devotion to Christ and demonstrated by care and concern for the sheep.⁴³ Paul listed this ministry gift in Eph 4:11 and warned the Ephesians elders in Acts 20 to "shepherd the church of God" and be vigilant because of "savage wolves," or false teachers, who were working within the church and among the sheep.⁴⁴ Peter exhorts the elders in 1 Pet 5:2–3 to "shepherd the flock of God ... exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock" (1 Pet 5:2–3). Again, humility was to characterize the relationship between leaders and followers (note 26). Vigilance and resistance against evil and suffering for a season would also characterize this relationship. Those who would flee in the face of danger were identified as "hired hands" in John 10:12–13. They cared nothing for the sheep and put personal safety above the well-being of the flock.

In the Old Testament the prophet, priest and king represented the specific leadership roles in Jewish society and all were considered "shepherds" of the people. As Moses passed on leadership to Joshua in Numbers 27, he used this pastoral imagery.

May the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation who will go out and come in before them, and who will lead

⁴³ David Bennett, *Metaphors of Ministry: Biblical Images for Leaders and Followers* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1993), 48. "Jesus instructs a disciple explicitly to do the work of a shepherd ... three times Jesus tells Peter to do the work of a shepherd ... Peter's obedience in taking up the task of shepherding will be the evidence of his genuine love for Jesus."

⁴⁴ Bennett, *Metaphors of Ministry*, 129.

them out and bring them in, so that the congregation of the LORD will not be like sheep which have no shepherd.

The same imagery was used when David was anointed king at Hebron in 2 Samuel 5:2 - “You were the one who led Israel out and in. And the LORD said to you, ‘You will shepherd My people Israel, and you will be a ruler over Israel’,” and in Psalm 78:70-72 - He also chose David His servant and took him from the sheepfolds: “from the care of the ewes with suckling lambs He brought him to shepherd Jacob His people, and Israel His inheritance. So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them with his skillful hands.” Character and competency were formed in David’s life as a young man caring for his father’s flock.

Throughout Israelite history the authentic leaders, or “true shepherds,” were those who spoke the Word of God to the people and encouraged them in their covenant responsibilities. They obeyed the Lord and remained true to the sacred covenantal relationship and institutions that had been established (chapter 2, note 50). As the nation drifted from their “true north,” the leadership became more self-focused and more interested in following the ways of their neighbors. Their unfaithfulness eventually led the nation to their darkest hour and the result was destruction and captivity under the Babylonian empire.⁴⁵ Jeremiah and Ezekiel both highlighted the leadership failure of their day. In Jeremiah 10 the shepherds had become כְּעֹר—stupid, dull senseless—because of idolatry and “learning the way of the nations” (10:1–16). They did not seek the Lord (10:21) and as result the sheep were scattered and the city under siege (10:17–20).

⁴⁵ Robert Quinn’s thesis in *Deep Change* is that any organization or institution unwilling to experience deep change will undergo slow death.

Indictment against the leadership in Jeremiah 23 parallels Jesus's words to the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23. The flock was destroyed and scattered because of inattentiveness and evil deeds by the shepherds. These shepherds were specifically identified as prophets and priests and were מְרִירִים—polluted, profane, and godless (23:11–12). “For both prophet and priest are polluted; even in My house I have found their wickedness, declares the LORD. Therefore their way will be like slippery paths to them.”

Their guidance and advice to the people was not from the Lord but from their own imagination and stubborn hearts. The message was inauthentic because it did not come from the Lord (23:18, 21): “But who has stood in the council of the LORD, that he should see and hear His word? Who has given heed to His word and listened? ... I did not send *these* prophets, but they ran. I did not speak to them, but they prophesied.”

Ezekiel 34 echoes the words of Jeremiah and lays out the indictment against the shepherds. They were feeding and clothing themselves while ignoring the flock and their leadership was characterized by force and domination.

Those who are sickly you have not strengthened, the diseased you have not healed, the broken you have not bound up, the scattered you have not brought back, nor have you sought for the lost; but with force and with severity you have dominated them. They were scattered for lack of a shepherd, and they became food for every beast of the field and were scattered. (Ezek 34:4–5)

Restoration is promised when the Lord Himself becomes the shepherd of His people and provides the protection and provision they need. He will accomplish what the false shepherds failed to do.

I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and bring them to their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the streams, and in all the inhabited places of the land. I will feed them in a good pasture, and their grazing ground will be on the mountain heights of Israel. There they will lie down on good grazing

ground and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I will feed My flock and I will lead them to rest,” declares the Lord GOD. (Ezek 34:14–15)

The same promise is given in Jeremiah 23 concerning the Messiah and his righteous reign when Israel will live in safety and security.⁴⁶ In this passage not only will the Lord shepherd His people, but He will raise up shepherds “after My own heart” (Jer. 3:15) who will genuinely care for His flock. These “under-shepherds” will minister as stewards, recognizing that the sheep belong to God, and they will employ both heart and mind in their leadership.

A shepherd needs God’s heart, but also a sharp, godly mind. The challenges of leadership require deep reservoirs of *discernment and wisdom*. This kind of “knowledge and understanding” comes, in part, from an awareness of the mission and destiny of this flock. Shepherd leaders are anchored theologically in the historic journey of God’s people in their various wildernesses.⁴⁷

The question of how to develop and acquire the necessary discernment and wisdom to meet this challenge of leadership is the topic of the next section in this chapter.

II. Biblical Discernment

The gift of discernment was highly valued in the tradition of the desert fathers in Egypt. Its importance and value in the Scriptures, both Old and New Testament is evident, and its rediscovery in our day is growing. This section looks at the meaning of discernment in the Old and New Testaments and how it was understood in the early

⁴⁶ Micah’s prophecy in 5:2–4 of Messiah being born in Bethlehem includes the pastoral imagery of the king shepherding his flock.

⁴⁷ Timothy Laniak, *Shepherds After My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2006), 22.

church. The discussion continues as discernment is examined and highlighted in the Patristic writings.

Discernment comes from the Latin *dis* meaning “apart” and *cernere* meaning “to separate.” It involves the ability to make a choice between two or more options with wisdom and insight; choosing between what is good and bad or between what is good and what is better. Wisdom literature in the Bible is primarily intended to help individuals make this choice; to find the right path and walk in it. Biblical discernment then is the ability to distinguish which path is the right path. In Proverbs 8:30 wisdom is personified and standing at the place near the city where the paths meet, the crossroads, and calling out to the many travelers who are passing by. With this picture in mind, discernment is the ability to stand at the crossroads and choose the right path. The importance of discernment is therefore highlighted throughout the wisdom literature as a necessary quality for the individual who wants to find success, peace, prosperity and long life.

The purpose of wisdom literature was to instruct the young on how to achieve the good life. As becomes obvious when the literature is read, the addressees were the upper-class youth, potential leaders. Thus the wisdom teachers had the responsibility of transferring to them the cultured life, which involved manners before royalty, personal honor, and morality ... they sought to equip them for decision making and a life of responsible leadership.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ C. Hassel Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Poetic Books: The Wisdom and Songs of Israel* (Chicago: Moody, 1979), 23

A. Discernment in the Old Testament

There are a number of Hebrew words used in the Old Testament that convey the meaning of discernment. שָׂכַל (sakal) is not the most frequent of these, but it is the first instance and is found in the tragic story of Adam and Eve's disobedience in Genesis 3. "When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable 'to make one wise', she took from its fruit and ate."

The word literally means "to be prudent" and is translated elsewhere as gaining insight, showing intelligence, prospering, understanding and behaving wisely.⁴⁹ There is perhaps no other biblical account that better demonstrates the importance of discernment and choosing wisely. Eve is faced with a choice in the garden that will not only affect her, but Adam as well, and through Adam all of humanity. Her conversation with the serpent makes it clear that she had full knowledge of the prohibition concerning eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The delight and the desire of the tree led to deception (1 Tim 2:14), and Eve chose the wrong path. Her decision and transgression led to Adam's disobedience and set in motion a chain of tragic events that would have long-lasting and far-reaching consequences.

God's command seemed insubstantial. She could see no reason not to eat. So "she took of its fruit and ate." The unthinkable and terrible is described as simply and unsensationally as possible. From the human perspective, it is all so natural and undramatic. But it was cosmic and eternal.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Robert L. Thomas, *New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible: Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries* (Nashville: Holman, 1981).

⁵⁰ R. K. Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004).

The key word here is “human perspective” and highlights the need for discernment and an ability to perceive and understand from beyond the human perspective. It involves hearing and obeying God’s word—giving heed, paying attention, following closely—and understanding the consequences of disobedience.

Following the exodus through the wilderness and the giving of the law at Sinai, Moses presents two paths to the children of Israel in Deut 30:19–20.

I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.

The Israelites had already agreed to the covenant, but Moses was nearing the end of his life and leadership and wanted to remind the people of their relationship with *YHWH* and encourage them in their covenantal responsibilities. A form of the Hebrew שָׁכַל (*sakal*) is found in this discourse and translated as “prosper” or “succeed” in Deuteronomy 29:9 - “Therefore keep the words of this covenant and do them, that you may ‘prosper’ in all that you do.” The significance of the “words of the covenant” and how these words would cause success for the Israelites should be highlighted here. When leadership transitions to Joshua after the death of Moses, שָׁכַל (*sakal*) is found twice in a similar admonition to the new leader in Josh 1:7–8.

Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

We can see from these two passages the relationship and importance between the Word of God and discernment. The passage in Joshua includes the admonition to “meditate on it day and night.” Success and prosperity (discernment) for the people of Israel required careful observance to the words of the covenant.

A similar transition occurred under David’s leadership as Solomon was crowned king and received instruction from his father. Early in David’s life the success **לְשָׂכָל** (sakal) that he enjoyed was evident to friends and foes alike (1 Sam 18:5, 14–15, 30). He attributed that success to insight and meditating on God’s word in Ps 119:99 - “I have more insight than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation.” As the scepter was passed from father to son, David emphasized the importance of God’s word and obedience to it for continued success and prosperity (**לְשָׂכָל**) under Solomon in I Kgs 2:2–3.

Be strong, and show yourself a man, and keep the charge of the LORD your God, walking in his ways and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his rules, and his testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn.

Prosperity and success are seen to be dependent upon careful observance and obedience to the Word of God. Solomon would later write of this in Prov 16:20, “He who gives attention to the word will prosper (**לְשָׂכָל**).” In fact the very purpose of the Proverbs of Solomon, given in Prov 1:2–3, was that wisdom, instruction and understanding would lead to discernment and wise behavior (**לְשָׂכָל**).

In addition to insight and success as a political and military leader, understanding (**לְשָׂכָל**) was given to David to build the temple, furnish it and order the divisions of priests and Levites for service. This was passed on to Solomon along with the gold, silver, bronze and other materials David had accumulated. The wealth without the wisdom was

not enough to build the sanctuary, any more than it was enough to lead the people of God in the paths of justice, righteousness and obedience to God's word. Wealth and prosperity without insight and understanding would quickly lead the people astray. The prophet Jeremiah wept for a people who, in their wealth and prosperity, had forsaken the ancient paths and whose leaders had led them astray. He looked forward to the time when God would give them shepherds after his own heart who would feed them on knowledge and understanding (שִׁלְלָהּ). The ultimate promise for a leader who would guide the people back to the right path was given in Jer 23:5–6:

Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely (שִׁלְלָהּ). and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. ⁶ In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: "The Lord is our righteousness."

Nowhere is this Hebrew word used more frequently in the Bible than in the book of Daniel. The opening chapter mentions the custom of the Babylonians and King Nebuchadnezzar in utilizing the intelligence of conquered nations by training their children in the ways of the Chaldeans. The chief official was commanded to find children who possessed, among other things, the quality of "intelligence in every branch of wisdom" (שִׁלְלָהּ) and set them apart for training in the king's court. Daniel was one of those chosen and demonstrated throughout the book his ability to discern, perceive correctly and choose wisely. This quality was recognized and highly valued by the king and his officials and set Daniel apart from all the other advisers. It was a quality that Daniel attributed to God, and because of his prayer, he was able to know and understand the dream of King Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 2. He acknowledged before the king that only the God of heaven could reveal such mysteries. Later in Daniel 5, King Belshazzar is

informed by the queen of Daniel's extraordinary abilities and insight in "knowledge, and understanding (לְשׂוֹן) to interpret dreams, explain riddles, and solve problems."⁵¹

Daniel 9 begins with an earnest prayer when Daniel observes in the writings of Jeremiah the length of captivity and the desolations of Jerusalem. The angel Gabriel is sent with the answer to this prayer and to give insight (לְשׂוֹן) and understanding. What follows is some of the most significant revelation and prophetic insight into the coming of Messiah.⁵² The importance of insight and leadership is highlighted in Dan 11:33, "Those who have insight among the people will give understanding to the many." Again in Daniel 12 during the last days and in times of great distress, there will be leaders who possess insight (לְשׂוֹן).

Those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever ... Many will be purged, purified and refined, but the wicked will act wickedly; and none of the wicked will understand, but those who have insight will understand.⁵³

The skill and insight in choosing wisely between two or more options is highlighted in the story of Abraham and Lot in Genesis 13. The two men had prospered and grown in wealth and separation was necessary to maintain peace between the two camps. Abraham offered to Lot the choice of which way to go and in which land to dwell. Lot saw the Jordan Valley, that it was fertile, well-watered and like the garden of the Lord, and he settled there. By outward appearance Lot had chosen the better of the two options. What he didn't perceive was how wicked the people were in this land and

⁵¹ Daniel 2:4–7:28 was originally written in Aramaic, not Hebrew.

⁵² The Seventy Weeks of Daniel 9.

⁵³ "Those who have insight" in Dan 11:33, 35 and 12:3, 10 literally means "instructors."

how his choice would result in much suffering and loss. 2 Peter 2:7–8 describes Lot’s condition as greatly distressed and tormented by what he saw among his neighbors. In the end he had to flee for his life as God poured out his judgment on the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. Having lost nearly everything dear to him, including his wife, Lot survived with his two daughters and lived in a cave in fear on the outskirts of Zoar. Such was the result of lacking discernment and insight and choosing based upon human perspective.

The Hebrew word בִּיָּן is used frequently in the Old Testament and translated as understanding and discerning. The root is found five hundred and sixty-two times in different forms and meanings, which include “to pay attention, examine, consider carefully and teach.” The preposition “between” is the same Hebrew root and highlights the idea of discernment and understanding with choosing options; either between what is good and bad or between what is good and what is better. When Solomon began his reign and the Lord appeared to him in a dream, it was this ability that the young king requested in 1 Kgs 3:9—“Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern בִּיָּן between good and evil.” The request was answered and the discernment and wisdom of Solomon was immediately manifested in the story of the two prostitutes. Which mother was telling the truth and which one was lying regarding their claims to the living child; this was Solomon’s dilemma. He responded to this challenge by commanding a sword to be brought. Dividing it with a sword is the act of discerning. In the New Testament the writer to the Hebrews refers to the sword of the Spirit, the

Word of God, and how it pierces, cuts and divides.⁵⁴ In doing so it reveals thoughts and intentions that are unseen. Solomon's word was concise and simple, "divide it," and through this word he revealed the truth and discerned what was right. This ability to discern set Solomon apart and caused the respect and the fear of his people toward their king.

Solomon represents the golden age of the Kingdom of Israel. Wealth and prosperity, peace and security, and a strong united kingdom lasted for forty years under Solomon's rule. "Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand which is on the seashore in abundance; they were eating and drinking and rejoicing."⁵⁵ This was also a time when wisdom literature flourished. It would take a little less than four hundred years for this kingdom to diminish and eventually be destroyed by the Babylonians and King Nebuchadnezzar. The prophet Jeremiah characterized the people of his day as "foolish and senseless people, who have eyes but do not see, and who have ears but do not hear." The ability to discern, to separate right from wrong and good from evil was gone, not only among the common and uneducated but among the leaders; the prophets, the priests and the king.⁵⁶ The ancient paths had been abandoned and there was a stubborn refusal to return.⁵⁷

The Hebrew root כִּי is used twice in Jer 23:20 where the fulfillment of God's word to Jeremiah will assuredly be fulfilled. "In the last days you will clearly understand

⁵⁴ Hebrews 4:12.

⁵⁵ 1 Kings 4:20.

⁵⁶ Jeremiah 5:1–5.

⁵⁷ Jeremiah 6:16–17

it (תִּתְּבוֹנְנוּ לָהּ בִּינָה).” The chapter begins with a condemnation against evil shepherds and continues with an indictment against false prophets. These prophets were assuring the people of peace and safety while Jeremiah was warning of judgment and war. Two messages, both claiming to be from God, and yet completely contradicting each other. “What does straw have in common with grain?” A clear distinction can be made between the two with the visible eye and one is clearly more profitable and beneficial than the other. The two messages that were being proclaimed should have been like straw and grain; easily distinguishable by the people.

The significance and importance of בִּינָה is seen throughout the book of Jeremiah and often as a matter of life and death. The people consistently chose what they wanted over what was right; a definite lack of discernment. Jeremiah advised the people to surrender and submit to the Babylonians while the false prophets assured the people of victory and God’s protection. Jeremiah counseled the people remaining in Jerusalem not to go down to Egypt for refuge while the false prophets advised them to go. Jeremiah encouraged the people to settle in for a seventy-year captivity while the false prophets promised a restoration in two years. The false prophets assured those who remained in Jerusalem following the first two deportations that God’s favor was upon the remnant and his judgment upon the captives. Jeremiah said the good figs were those who were captive in Babylon while the rotten figs were those who remained in Jerusalem. They were destined for pestilence, famine and sword. Why such contradictory messages? The difference was between those who stood in the council of the Lord and those who didn’t; those who saw, heard, gave heed and listened to God’s word and those who prophesied out of the deception of their own heart.

B. Discernment in the New Testament

The sure and ancient path was manifested in the New Testament in the person of Jesus Christ. The gospels open with John the Baptist in the wilderness proclaiming from Isaiah 40, “Prepare the way of the Lord.” At the end of the gospels Thomas asked Jesus to show them the way, to which He replied, “I am the way.” Jesus described the people of his generation to be like those in Isaiah’s and Jeremiah’s day, as “having ears to hear but not understanding and having eyes to see but not perceiving.”⁵⁸ The Hebrew word בִּיִן is used in this reference by Jesus from the prophecy of Isa 6:9 in the Old Testament and emphasized the inability of this generation to distinguish or separate between the true and the false.

“Seeing” and “hearing” are each used in two different senses here, once for simple sensory perception and then for the kind of insight that leads to acceptance of the gospel and discipleship. “Understanding” is a key word for Matthew in this chapter. Jesus declares that the words of Isaiah are now being fulfilled ... the pattern of behavior in Isaiah’s time is repeating itself and being completed in Jesus’ day among those who reject him.⁵⁹

Because of this lack of perception, they consistently asked Jesus to show them a sign concerning his authority and identity. In response Jesus pointed to their lack of discernment, *διάκρισις*, in relation to the signs of the time they were living in. They could understand and distinguish the weather forecast by the sky but couldn’t distinguish the significance of His presence among them by the works He was doing and the words He was speaking. They were without understanding.

⁵⁸ Matthew 13:14; Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10; John 12:40.

⁵⁹ Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary 22 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992).

Diakrisis [διάκρισις] is the Greek word found in the New Testament that carries a similar meaning to the Hebrew יָבַד—separation, distinction, differentiation. In Heb 5:14 discernment is needed to separate what is good from what is evil. Those who have their senses exercised by the word of God are compared to those who are mature and able to handle solid food. The immature are like babies needing milk and unable to distinguish right from wrong.

Solid nourishment, corresponds to the nature and the wants of the *mature*, who possess organs of perception (αἰσθητήρια) for the distinguishing of what is wholesome and what is pernicious, and these, indeed, as disciplined διὰ τὴν ἐξιν. Ἐξιν is the *habitus*, *holding*, or state acquired by exercise, in its permanent character or result, as skill, readiness, capacity.⁶⁰

The dilemma in Hebrews is similar to that in Jeremiah's day and the need for discernment likewise a matter of life and death. Which path to choose and how to distinguish between which way is right, whether to return to Judaism or to continue on in Christ, is fundamentally tied to the Word of God.

In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul includes discerning [διάκρισις] of spirits among the gifts given to the church for the growth and health of the body. According to John Chrysostom in one of the oldest commentaries on 1 Corinthians 12, the Greek customs and particularly strong influence and presence of soothsayers and false prophets in the city of Corinth necessitated the ability for believers, particularly leaders, to distinguish between what was false and true.⁶¹ “This gift follows directly after that of prophecy and it is likely

⁶⁰ John Peter Lange and Philip Schaff, eds., *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Hebrews* (1868; repr., Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008).

⁶¹ Joseph T. Leinhard, “On Discernment of Spirits in the Early Church,” *Theological Studies* 41, no. 3 (1980).

that it particularly refers to the ability to determine the origin of prophetic and ecstatic utterances, i.e. whether actuated by the Holy Spirit or by some demonic source.”⁶² It was the responsibility of all Christians to examine and test [δοκιμάζω] the spirits and determine their authenticity and origin, whether from God or from another source, according to 1 John 4:1. In 1 Corinthians 12, however, this particular gift of *διάκρισις* is given to certain individuals within the church.

Discernment is therefore a gift of the Holy Spirit, granted specially to certain charismatic members of the Church but possessed by the entire community, in the midst of which it is exercised at ecclesial gatherings. It supposes prophecy just as the interpretations of tongues supposes the gift of tongues. To discern is to recognize whether the prophetic word comes from the Spirit of God or from some other spirit.⁶³

John’s admonition in his first letter to “test” the spirits refers to examining and assessing authenticity and source: “whether they be from God or not.” Though a different Greek word is used,⁶⁴ Origen relates this reference directly with 1 Corinthians 12.

I conclude from this that it is no small grace to recognize a mouth which the devil opens. It is not possible to discern a mouth and words of this sort without the grace of the Holy Spirit. Thus, in the divisions of spiritual graces, there is also added this: that to certain men is given discernment of spirits “discretio spirituum” The grace, therefore, by which a spirit is discerned is spiritual, as the apostle says in another place: “test the spirits to see if they are from God” [1 John 4:1].⁶⁵

⁶² Antony D. Rich, *Discernment in the Desert Fathers: Diakrisis in the Life and Thought of Early Egyptian Monasticism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 7.

⁶³ Adalbert de Vogüé, “The Criteria of the Discernment of Vocations in the Ancient Monastic Tradition,” *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (2000): 144.

⁶⁴ The Greek word δοκιμάζω is found throughout the N.T. with such meanings as testing the authenticity of one’s work (Gal 6:4), oneself (1 Cor 11:28; II Cor 13:5), leadership (1 Tim 3:10), approving what is excellent and essential (Phil 1:10, Rom 2:18), understanding God’s will (Rom 12:2).

⁶⁵ Leinhard, “On Discernment of Spirits in the Early Church,” 513.

The early Church recognized the need for God's grace and the Spirit of truth to help believers distinguish between what was from God and what was from another source, either of the flesh or of the evil one. Apart from grace of God and the work of the Holy Spirit, making this distinction was not possible.

III. Discernment in Patristic Literature

A. Origen

Origen of Alexandria was both philosopher and theologian and considered the first to provide a systematic theology for the Christian Church and analysis of biblical discernment. He was schooled in the Greek philosophies of his day and demonstrated a depth of biblical understanding at an early age. During Origen's life (185–254) the Church was experiencing both persecution from without and numerous heresies from within. Describing the cultural milieu of Alexandria in his day, Pamela Gebauer mentions the existence of both pagan and Christian schools in the city.

Pagan and Christian schools in Alexandria existed side by side and drew from each other. There reigned at that time in Alexandria a remarkable spirit both of toleration and syncretism—Jews, Christians, Gnostics, philosophers and adherents of pagan mystery cults were all interested in opportunities to share their ideas.⁶⁶

Eusebius states that Origen became headmaster of the catechetical school in Alexandria at the age of seventeen.⁶⁷ His well-known work *On First Principles* emphasized the

⁶⁶ Pamela Gebauer, "The Notion of Spiritual Discernment in the Writings of Origen, Antony of Egypt and Ignatius of Loyola: A Comparative Study" (Master's thesis, Concordia University, 2000), 5.

⁶⁷ Edward Moore, "Origen of Alexandria," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed September 5, 2016, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/origen-of-alexandria/>.

Trinity and nature of God, the nature of man and his free-will, and the restoration of all things (*apokatastasis*).

On First Principles (*Peri Archon*) presents Christian doctrine within a Greek philosophical framework. Origen used the concept of free-will to describe and explain the diversity among human experience despite the unity of God, the Creator. He separates the created, rational and spiritual beings into three categories: good angels, mankind, and evil angels. As man progresses toward God, he needs the ability to discern and distinguish the good angels from the evil angels if progress is to be made. His argument for free-will and discernment go together.

For Origen spiritual discernment is both a function of free-will and of the reasoning power with which rational beings have been create. In his cosmology there are three categories of rational beings. Humans are caught up in the middle between the angels and good spirits who help them and the wicked angels and spirits who try to impede their progress towards good. Caught up in this spiritual battle where humans are free to choose between good and evil, they have also been given another capacity: the ability to distinguish between good and evil.⁶⁸

Scripture rather than the different schools of Greek philosophy becomes the starting point and foundation of true knowledge. Origen believed that the creation of man in the image of God enabled mankind to respond to grace and be restored despite the consequences of the fall. Sin had the effect of distorting and corrupting the will and opening the door to deception and evil influence. Scripture then becomes difficult at times to understand because of this corruption. Discernment is needed and exercised in the interpretation of Scripture, according to Origen, especially “the veil over the

⁶⁸ Gebauer, “Notion of Spiritual Discernment,” 12.

figurative meaning which is lifted by the gift of God.”⁶⁹ Only Christ can initiate and assist in mankind’s progress back to God and restoration to his original state. According to Origen, study of Scripture is an important component of this progress and restoration but not effective in and of itself.

While God invites us and provides grace for the journey, we must respond to God by taking the narrow path of ongoing study and moral practice to reach that immense breadth of contemplation ... for human beings the goal is reverent contemplation, not the possessive grasp of academic knowledge.⁷⁰

Moral practice can be understood as ascetic discipline and is the second component necessary for discernment and progress in restoration according to Origen.

Abstention from physical bodily desires were the disciplines necessary to purify the heart and mind and make progress possible. An interesting allegorical interpretation is given by Origen in one of his sermons on the text of Abraham and Lot in Genesis 18. With the former, God shared a banquet but with the latter God didn’t accompany the two angels and didn’t partake in the meal in Sodom.

“Do you see”, Origen quizzed his congregation at Caesarea, “what kind of place it is, in which the Lord can hold a feast? Abraham’s keen sight and gaze delighted him. For he was pure of heart, with the result that he could see God. So it is in such a place, such a heart, that the Lord can hold a banquet in the company of his angels.”⁷¹

Origen explained how Abraham was sitting outside his tent, away from carnal pleasures and desires. This is but one example of how Origen viewed asceticism and abstention as

⁶⁹ Rich, *Discernment in the Desert Fathers*, 37.

⁷⁰ Hilary Case, “Becoming One Spirit: Origen and Evagrius Ponticus on Prayer” (Master’s thesis, College of St. Benedict/St. John’s University, 2006), 62.

⁷¹ Richard Finn, *Asceticism in the Graeco-Roman World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 101.

an important component of spiritual progress in purity. Carnal pleasures and passions not only distorted but prevented man from seeing the glory of God. The ability to rightly discern was effected by these passions and pleasures. Both movements from outside the individual and those inside the individual needed to be distinguished and discerned according to Origen's understanding; knowledge of self and knowledge of the outside world were keys to discernment. He refers often to Heb 5:14 in his writings and understands training and exercise as necessary to develop the spiritual senses.⁷² Among the exercises presented as a necessary part of this training were fasting, poverty and sexual renunciation.

Origen's understanding of asceticism as integral to progress in any Christian life, but as having greater purchase and more perfect form in a life of voluntary poverty and sexual renunciation, is of profound consequence for the history of Christian asceticism in the late third to fifth centuries.

B. St. Antony and Athanasius

St. Antony (251–356), considered the founder of desert monasticism in Egypt, was clearly influenced by the writings of Origen. In his *Seven Letters* he introduces many of the same philosophical concepts, such as the importance of self-knowledge and the restoration of man's original state, the unity of God and the free will of man. Similar to the teachings of Origen, those who know themselves and understand their origin are those who know God, according to Antony.

This self-knowledge which enables a person to truly understand their original condition, the "immortal substance" within them that was created,

⁷² P. B. Decock, "Discernment in Origen of Alexandria," *Acta Theologica* 33, S17 (2013): 202–203.

but will never die, and to understand that sin is foreign to this spiritual immortal nature, is also what will help that person discern the difference between evil and good, between what is alien and what is authentic to the nature of their “immortal substance.”⁷³

Discernment was a topic that Antony wrote of extensively and considered the greatest of all virtues.⁷⁴ *The Life of Antony* written by Athanasius “treats discernment of spirits more thoroughly than any other patristic writing.”

Almost one third of the *Vita* consists of an exhortation delivered by Antony to an assembled crowd of monks (ch. 16–43), and the discernment of spirits is its principal subject. This is indicated by Athanasius’ comment at the end of the exhortation: “All were persuaded to despise the snares of the devil, and everyone marveled at the grace which the Lord had given to Antony for the discernment of spirits.”⁷⁵

Antony offers the disciples in the desert spiritual advice on how to recognize the works of evil spirits. The primary goal of the monks was purity of heart and making progress in the journey required a keen sense of discernment and ability to distinguish between what was good from what was evil. “For Antony spiritual discernment is needed by those seeking a holy life to help them see how evil powers wish to gain control and enslave their free will. There are traps being laid at every turn for those who would closely follow after God.”⁷⁶ Both Origen and Antony warned against negligence and both emphasized the need for divine help and grace in this spiritual battle: “Our mind and heart must be tended at all times, for there are evil spirits, waiting like robbers, for a good resting place. Our

⁷³ Gebauer, “Notion of Spiritual Discernment,” 33.

⁷⁴ G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware, eds., *The Philokalia* (London: Faber & Faber, 1995), 98.

⁷⁵ Leinhard, “On Discernment of Spirits in the Early Church,” 515.

⁷⁶ Gebauer, “Notion of Spiritual Discernment,” 46.

negligence may give them an opening because we have failed to call for help from God.”⁷⁷

Origen and Antony also both used the concept of discernment with “spirits,” thus linking it with the spiritual gift Paul writes about in 1 Corinthians 12.⁷⁸ The Holy Spirit is responsible for the work of restoration and purification in the believer and is also the one who gives wisdom and discernment.

This wisdom that is granted them as a gift from the Holy Spirit has to do with being taught by the Holy Spirit and in knowing themselves according to their intellectual substance ... this enables the person ... to discern good from evil and to perceive in the words of Antony “the many hidden malignities which the evil spirits pour upon us daily.”⁷⁹

Antony understood discernment as both a gift of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12) and an ability of the new nature that needed to be trained and exercised (Heb 5:14). “Much prayer and *ascesis* are needed for each one who receives through the Spirit the *charism* of the discernment of spirits to become capable of knowing about them.”⁸⁰ Discernment enabled the believer to distinguish evil spirits that were acting upon and influencing the thoughts, feelings and interior movements of the soul. Thus Antony departed from the New Testament understanding of the gift of discernment, which according to Paul, operated in a corporate setting to distinguish the authenticity of an oral message within

⁷⁷ Gebauer, “Notion of Spiritual Discernment,” 48.

⁷⁸ In the *Life of Antony*, “discernment” is used four times and always linked with “spirits.”

⁷⁹ Gebauer, “Notion of Spiritual Discernment,” 50–51.

⁸⁰ Vogüé, “Criteria of the Discernment of Vocations,” 145.

the community. To Antony discernment also became an ability for the individual monk in the privacy of his cell to distinguish evil thoughts and feelings.

The matter to discern or to test is no longer for him exterior and oral but interior and mental; instead of a prophetic message uttered by another, it is the visions and apparitions that come upon the subject himself, together with the movements that they arouse in him. The framework is no longer communitarian but private; instead of the Christian assembly, it is the cell where each one lives alone.⁸¹

The interior movements indicating evil spirits would include anxiety, confusion, fear and troubling thoughts. Movements indicating the good spirit would include confidence, freedom, peace, calmness and joy.

C. Evagrius

Evagrius Ponticus was a disciple of Macarius, a desert theologian and ascetic, and author of *Praktikos*, the earliest known written collection of the sayings of Antony, Macarius and other early desert fathers. In his introduction to these men he states the following: “It is a very necessary thing also to examine carefully the ways of the monks who have traveled, in an earlier age, straight along the road and to direct oneself along the same paths.”⁸²

Like Poemen he recognized and emphasized the importance of passing on the wisdom and guidance of the elders to each successive generation.

In the ascetic tradition of the Egyptian desert, Evagrius presumes that no one can progress without the help of others who have traveled the same path. Indeed, both by writing and by giving spiritual direction, Evagrius

⁸¹ Vogüé, “Criteria of the Discernment of Vocations,” 145.

⁸² William Harmless, *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 516.

spent much of his monastic life assisting others to travel that true road toward knowledge of God.⁸³

Like his predecessors as well, Evagrius emphasized the importance of discernment and its central role in reaching the goals of the monastic life. “It is absolutely necessary for someone who serves as a soldier in this warfare to seek διάκρισις from the Lord, and neglecting nothing that contributes towards the reception of such a gift.”⁸⁴ Purity of heart and union with God is the ultimate goal and can only be achieved as the individual is cleansed of passions and delivered from ignorance. *Praktikai* refers to ascetic practices that help to overcome the passions and *gnosis* is the knowledge gained through both the natural world and the spiritual world. Discernment is essential for both, according to Evagrius, to teach the monk how to apply ascetic disciplines and how to understand the deeper meaning of Scripture. Evagrius introduced the concept of *logismoi*, thoughts that “originate from without and usually by demonic spirits.”⁸⁵ He lists these *logismoi* as eight principal vices that battle against the monks’ ultimate goal and must be discerned from within. These eight vices would later become ‘the seven deadly sins’. “Discern the *logismoi* in the sanctuary of the kardia ... for he who is a precise examiner of the *logismoi* is also a true lover of the commandments.”⁸⁶

⁸³ Case, “Becoming One Spirit,” 63.

⁸⁴ Rich, *Discernment in the Desert Fathers*, 43.

⁸⁵ Case, “Becoming One Spirit,” 123.

⁸⁶ Case, “Becoming One Spirit,” 123.

Monks were encouraged to observe closely their own weaknesses and vulnerabilities and to give attention to their thoughts. Self-awareness and self-knowledge were essential to progress.

Let him observe their intensity, their periods of decline and follow them as they rise and fall. Let him note well the complexity of his thoughts, their periodicity, the demons which cause them, with the order of their succession and the nature of their associations. Then let him ask from Christ the explanations of these data he has observed.⁸⁷

Evagrius understood discernment as a grace, or gift, from Christ to help the monk understand his observations of interior movements and thoughts and apply the necessary *praktikai* to overcome the demonic forces at work.

D. John Cassian

John Cassian is credited with introducing Egyptian monasticism and the teachings of the desert to the Latin West through *The Institutes* and *The Conferences*. Born in the West he came to Bethlehem as a monk and later the Egyptian desert where he learned the ways of the desert fathers and was considered one of the disciples of Evagrius. He holds the distinction of being the only Western born writer (or the only Latin writer) included in the *Philokalia*. In his second Conference he highlighted the importance of discernment and called it “the greatest gift of God’s grace.”

Discrimination, then, is no small virtue but one of the most important gifts of the Holy Spirit ... the gift of discrimination in nothing worldly or insignificant. A monk must seek this gift with all his strength and diligence and acquire the ability to discriminate between the spirits that enter him and to assess them accurately.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Gerald L. Sittser, “The Battle Without and Within: The Psychology of Sin and Salvation in the Desert Fathers and Mothers,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 2, no. 1 (2009): 59.

⁸⁸ Palmer, Sherrard, and Ware, *Philokalia*, 1: 98.

Cassian cites I Corinthians 12:10 at the beginning of the second conference and mentions specifically “discernment of spirits” as one of the gifts of the Spirit. This is the first and last time Cassian references “discernment of spirits” in the Conferences. Following in the teaching of Evagrius, Cassian refers to discernment and its importance in identifying and combatting the *logismoi*. The second half of the *Institutes* deals with the eight vices⁸⁹ listed by Evagrius and how the monk uses discernment to expose “the origins of these faults.”⁹⁰ The *Conferences* then detail the ascetic disciplines⁹¹ that must be practiced for the monk to make progress, this also requiring discernment. “Monks need to discern the lifestyle and practical disciplines appropriate to them and distinguish between good and bad examples of monastic practices.”⁹²

According to Cassian discernment is a gift of the Spirit that both exposes and reveals faults and thoughts that are of evil origin and also provides the weapon to defeat them by informing the monk on how to use the proper ascetic practices.

Discretio enables the monk to watch over his thoughts, to determine their nature and origin, and to choose which to accept and reject. It is the power to distinguish between good and bad things, actions and thoughts and to choose how best to respond to them ... By using *discretio* in conjunction with the practical disciplines ... the monk is able to examine and govern his inner and outer life bringing them to purity and harmony.⁹³

⁸⁹ These are listed as gluttony, fornication, greed, anger, sadness, sloth, vanity and pride.

⁹⁰ Finn, *Asceticism in the Graeco-Roman World*, 125.

⁹¹ Rich, *Discernment in the Desert Fathers*, 86. These disciplines (*Praktikai*) would include fasting, vigils, work, renunciation, solitude, constant prayer and reading, memorizing and meditating on Scripture.

⁹² Rich, *Discernment in the Desert Fathers*, 92.

⁹³ Rich, *Discernment in the Desert Fathers*, 99.

The importance of obedience to a superior and submitting to the authority of the elders was emphasized in Cassian's writings. Three graces were required for the acquisition of discernment—humility, obedience and patience. These were developed in the context of a relationship to one's *Abba*.

Beginners can obtain discretion only by submission to elders. They can learn discretion only from one who has walked the path beforehand and learned from the example of fore bearers. True discretion lies imbedded in a tradition of discernment that must be learned from others: hence the importance of obedience to one who has learned to follow the example of Christ.⁹⁴

The writings of Cassian, though not without detractors, gained a large following in the western Church and helped shape the rules and practices of monasticism there.

Pope Gregory the Great (c. 540–604) used Cassian's description of the eight principal faults as the basis of his writing on the seven deadly sins. Above all, St. Benedict's *Rule*, probably composed in the mid-sixth century, would recommend the reading of both the *Institutes* and the *Conferences*, thereby securing Cassian's place among the monastic authorities of medieval Europe.⁹⁵

Other ascetic writers such as Rufinus and Elder Melania, along with Jerome and Palladius would insure that the teachings of Origen and Evagrius would be passed on to influence the Western church. "However, of equal or even greater importance in the West were the monastic writings of John Cassian through whose pen Evagrian ideas were successfully disguised and disseminated. Origen's ascetic legacy, though invisible, was all-pervasive.

⁹⁴ Philip Turner, "John Cassian and the Desert Fathers: Sources for Christian Spirituality," *Pro Ecclesia* 13, no. 4 (2004): 482.

⁹⁵ Finn, *Asceticism in the Graeco-Roman World*, 129–30.

... He, along with St. Benedict, did more than any other figure to shape the ascetical tradition of the Western church.”⁹⁶

E. St. Benedict of Nursia

The founder of Western monasticism, Benedict of Nursia (480–542), was greatly influenced by the writings of John Cassian. Quotations from the *Institutes* and the *Conferences* “abound in the *Rule of St. Benedict* and the *Conferences* were part of the reading before Compline each night in Benedictine monasteries.”⁹⁷ Like Cassian discernment was considered the mother of virtues according to Benedict and “*discretio* has come to be considered the typical Benedictine virtue.”⁹⁸ In one instance in the Rule, the discretion of Jacob is highlighted from Gen 33:13—“If I cause my flocks to be overdriven, they will all perish in one day.” Moderation in leadership and spiritual authority is understood as good discernment.

Discretion, for Benedict, is no longer precisely a virtue, but rather a control on other virtues, the fine intuition into his subjects’ strengths and weaknesses that allows the abbot to guide them and foster their growth without straining them or letting them become lax. Even so, the trail leading back from Benedict to the deserts of Egypt has not been obscured.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Turner, “John Cassian and the Desert Fathers,” 467.

⁹⁷ Benedicta Ward, trans., *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1975), xx.

⁹⁸ Leinhard, “On Discernment of Spirits in the Early Church,” 527.

⁹⁹ Leinhard, “On Discernment of Spirits in the Early Church,” 528.

Benedict supported Cassian's assertion that monks live in obedience to an elder, and the Rule "opens with a summons to the individual monk to listen and to obey."¹⁰⁰ Obedience to a superior had not been formalized in western monasticism and Benedict's rule emphasized and organized this aspect of communal living around the leadership of an abbot.

Within these constraints [of the *Rule*], power is almost entirely concentrated in the abbot's hands. Early western monastic rules had not found it necessary to describe and underline his authority so clearly ... describing his role as that of father and teacher and making him responsible to God on the Day of Judgement for all the souls in his care ... for he is believed to be the representative of Christ in the monastery.¹⁰¹

Such authority over others required discernment in the leader to know how to deal with different temperaments and personalities and how to deal with a variety of problems and challenges that would require discipline and correction within the monastery.

Discretion is a quality particularly needed by the abbot, who must be able to serve a variety of temperaments, coaxing, reproving and encouraging them as appropriate. He must accommodate and adapt himself to each one's character and intelligence: some will respond to convincing argument, some to appeal, others to reproof and rebuke. In correcting the brethren he must not go to extremes, lest by rubbing too hard to remove the rust, he may break the vessel.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Marilyn Dunn, *The Emergence of Monasticism: From the Desert Fathers to the Early Middle Ages* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 115.

¹⁰¹ Dunn, *Emergence of Monasticism*, 118.

¹⁰² Edith Scholl, "The Mother of Virtues: Discretio," *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 3 (2001): 394.

F. Gregory the Great and Others

Gregory the Great writes of Benedict's discretion and highlights the art of discernment in his book *Pastoral Care*, a practical handbook on discernment that emphasized the importance of discretion in leadership and dealing with others.

"Discretion for Gregory, as for Benedict, never becomes merely a matter of moderation, although it may include that. It is above all a question of choosing the right direction."¹⁰³

Other writers on discernment during this period would include Diodochus, bishop of Photice in Greece, and Pelagius. Joseph Leinhard mentions that the Western church relied primarily on the Eastern teaching of διακρίσις and "discernment of spirits" "underwent no independent development in the Latin West."¹⁰⁴ "As in the later East, the teaching on discernment in the West is found in the literature of monasticism. The Western monastic movement was itself derived from the Eastern and looked to the East for its inspiration and ideals."¹⁰⁵

Leinhard also mentions the significance of Origen's contribution and his influence on the development of the concept of discernment. "In terms of historical influence, Origen stands at the head of the tradition. Palladius, Diadochus, and John Cassian were all disciples of the Origenist Evagrius Ponticus, and Cassian in turn exercised a strong influence on Benedict."¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Scholl, "Mother of Virtues," 395.

¹⁰⁴ Leinhard, "On Discernment of Spirits in the Early Church," 524.

¹⁰⁵ Leinhard, "On Discernment of Spirits in the Early Church," 525.

¹⁰⁶ Leinhard, "On Discernment of Spirits in the Early Church," 529.

Reminiscent of the Old Testament wisdom literature, the wisdom of the desert emphasized the importance of following in the “pathways” of the elders, or *abbas*.¹⁰⁷ The sure path was the one that had been discovered through discernment by Antony and the elders who had followed in his footsteps and teachings. Progress for each successive generation depended upon obedience to the “sayings” passed on by previous leaders. In the desert tradition of a disciple seeking out the wisdom of an elder, the following provides a clear indication of the importance of following a sure path and obedience to those who had gone before:

A brother who followed the life of stillness in the monastery of the cave of Abba Saba came to Abba Elias and said to him, “Abba, give me a **w**ay of life.” The old man said to the brother, “In the days of our predecessors they took great care about these three virtues: poverty, obedience and fasting.”¹⁰⁸

One final concept to mention before wrapping up the Patristic literature and the understanding and development of discernment during this time is the idea of discernment in vocation and the necessity of probation. Adalbert de Vogue wrote an interesting article on this subject and highlighted the understanding developed by the desert fathers on John 4:1 and “testing the spirits.” He mentions the meaning of “test” and “examine” in Greek and Latin and how it also carries the meaning of “to suffer and be afflicted.” As the desert became a city and hundreds sought out the elders for discipleship and training, discernment was needed to determine the authenticity of the disciples and their calling to this particular vocation. Was the calling from God and would they

¹⁰⁷ One example of this is found in the Proverbs 2:1 “My son if you will receive my words and treasure my commandments within you ... then you will discern righteousness and justice and equity and every good path.”

¹⁰⁸ Ward, *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, 72.

persevere in the harshness of the desert environment and under the strict ascetic disciplines that would be required? “Testing” and “examining” were required on these new candidates and came to include “waiting, dire predictions, and the proof of obedience.”¹⁰⁹ These were intended to cause suffering and affliction and would test the patience and perseverance of the candidate. Those who came to the elders were often left waiting at the door for days to test their perseverance and later given irrational or sensational commands to test their obedience. “According to Cassian the period of waiting is prolonged for ten days or more and is accompanied by harsh treatment. Thus it was that Egyptian cenobites put to the test the vigor of the postulants’ desire, their humility, their patience and their aptitude to persevere.”¹¹⁰ This probationary period, the dire warnings that were given and the demands for obedience became the norm for receiving new candidates in Western monasticism as well. Benedict’s Rule, the Provencal rules, the Spanish rules and the Irish-Frankish rules “foresee the welcoming and testing of postulants.” “Almost everywhere we find the delay at the gate, the testing of patience, the reading of the Rule, and the promise to observe it.”¹¹¹

Gregory the Great praises this method of testing and refers to this time of probation as *discretio*, or discernment. “The pope continues, speaking twice of the *discretio* with which those who are converting to the monastic life should be received.

¹⁰⁹ Vogüé, “Criteria of the Discernment of Vocations,” 152.

¹¹⁰ Vogüé, “Criteria of the Discernment of Vocations,” 155.

¹¹¹ Vogüé, “Criteria of the Discernment of Vocations,” 158.

This word *discretio*, a synonym for “probation,” clearly signifies here a discernment of vocations in line with the “discernment of spirits” of Saint Paul.”¹¹²

According to Wendy Anderson in her book *The Discernment of Spirits: Assessing Visions and Visionaries in the Late Middle Ages*, “there was relatively little new writing on the discernment of spirits between the fifth and twelfth centuries.”¹¹³

IV. Summary

The recurring story in the Bible is of man going astray and losing his way and God’s relentless pursuit to bring him back. God is the Good Shepherd who raises up under-shepherds to care for, guard and lead the sheep along the sure path. Self-deception and hypocrisy are a constant danger to spiritual leadership and God’s word is of critical importance for success and understanding. Credibility can only be established when actions and behavior are in alignment with the word spoken and the core values espoused. Hiding the true self and disguising the interior reality of the heart is a form of hypocrisy, as is acting in a way to please others out of fear or for selfish gain. The Scriptures show this is possible even for authentic leaders as in the example of Peter and Barnabas given in Galatians 2. Discernment is the ability to differentiate and distinguish the wheat from the tares, what is true from what is false, and is of primary importance for individual spiritual growth and leading others along the sure path. The importance of discernment is highlighted in both the Old and New Testament and is a prominent and

¹¹² Vogüé, “Criteria of the Discernment of Vocations,” 159.

¹¹³ Wendy Love Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits: Assessing Visions and Visionaries in the Late Middle Ages* (Tubingen: Mohr Seibeck, 2011), 37.

recurring theme in the desert movement. Matta El-Meskeen understands discernment as “spiritual insight” and emphasizes its priority for spiritual leaders. Authentic leaders have self-awareness, recognizing their strengths and weaknesses, and are transparent and honest before others. The prerequisite for self-awareness is discernment as it reveals and overcomes the natural tendency for self-deception and hiding.

The biblical institutions in the Bible story include the people of Israel in the Old Testament and their leadership represented as prophet, priests and kings, and the Church in the New Testament. The shepherd best represents authentic leadership in both. Quinn’s argument in *Deep Change*, that both individuals and organizations are facing the same dilemma (deep change or slow death) is evident in the biblical narrative. The call to authenticity, to both the individual and the group, is the story of redemption; becoming who we were meant to be, our true selves. It’s also evident in the institution of the Coptic Church, as will be seen in the next chapter, both within the church itself and within the monastic communities. Matta El-Meskeen demonstrates Quinn’s proposition that “one person can change the larger system or organization in which he or she exists.”¹¹⁴ Experiencing deep change personally is what empowers an individual to bring change to others.

¹¹⁴ Quinn, *Deep Change: Discovering the Leader Within*, xii.

CHAPTER 4:
EGYPT: MODERNITY AND REFORM
IN THE COPTIC CHURCH

The path once trodden by courageous pioneers is easily missed by the
overgrowth of indifference to our own history.¹

—Rick Curry

The following two chapters take a qualitative approach to research using the two methodologies of historical and narrative study. Discovering and examining past events and relating these to the present and future is the purpose of historical research. This chapter looks at the events in Egypt from the early 1800s as a background to better understand the life of Matta El-Meskeen. Data obtained for this historical research was primarily through printed material and oral reports. Both primary and secondary sources were used. Chapter 5 relies heavily on narrative research using the biography of Matta El-Meskeen.² Additional data was obtained through articles and books, both written by and about Matta. A handful of theses were also used along with visits to St. Macarius Monastery where informal interviews were conducted with the monks to insure accuracy of information.

¹ Daniel Norris, *Trail of Fire: True Stories from Ten of the Most Powerful Moves of God* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma, 2016), 4.

² The biography of Matta El-Meskeen was published in Arabic in 2008 and is currently being translated into English. Though the English translation has not yet been published at this date, I had available to me the first eighteen chapters in English. The narrative research conducted does not include the last twelve chapters of the biography.

I. Napoleon's Invasion and the Rise of Muhammad Ali

Matta El-Meskeen grew up in an Egypt that was much different from that of his forefathers. Significant changes had occurred in the nineteenth century. The revival in the Coptic Church and the monastic communities in the deserts of Egypt in the twentieth century could not have occurred had it not been for these significant historical events. A rapid process of modernization swept through Egypt in the 1800s that led to a transformation of traditional Egyptian society. Two significant factors that led the way to modernity were the influence of outsiders and the growth of education. These two factors would challenge the ancient Coptic Church and prepare the Christians of Egypt for reformation and revival. The Sunday School Movement would be a direct result of these two factors.

Beginning with Napoleon's arrival on the shores of Alexandria in 1798, Egypt would witness a steady flow of foreigners entering the country. Napoleon's presence was short-lived, but the impact of his invasion was significant and the French presence on Egyptian soil would continue to grow over the next century. The French leader instituted reforms that led to better management and organization of the government and French scientists helped with improvements in health and agricultural production.³ Over one hundred and sixty scientists, artists and scholars accompanied Napoleon and his forces into Egypt for the purpose of exploration and study. Their works would awaken an

³ S. S. Hassan, *Christian Versus Muslim in Modern Egypt: The Century-Long Struggle for Coptic Equality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 33. Long staple cotton was introduced to Egypt by a French agricultural engineer, which would later transform the Egyptian economy.

interest on the European continent to the treasures of ancient Egypt and the richness of its culture.⁴

The Ottoman Empire sent forces to challenge Napoleon's occupation of Egypt in 1803 and quickly defeated the French General and his army. A member of those forces was an Albanian soldier, Muhamad Ali, who rose to power following the departure of Napoleon and became governor of Egypt in 1805. Considered by many to be the founder of modern Egypt, Muhamad Ali would lead Egypt through enormous change. His intentions were not to modernize the country but to build a military that would both defeat any future European aggression and consolidate his power. To do this he conscripted Egyptians into the military for the first time in centuries and recruited officers from abroad, many of them French, who had served under Napoleon. Industrialization began in Egypt in an attempt to supply the military hardware needed to equip a modern army. A new emphasis on education began for the same reason.⁵ A modern army relied on doctors, engineers, and other skilled professions, and Egypt at the time was mostly illiterate.⁶ Muhamad Ali initially relied upon recruits from the traditional schools affiliated with the mosques and Al-Azhar, but by the early 1830s the growth of

⁴ Arthur Goldschmidt, Jr., *A Brief History of Egypt* (New York: Facts on File, 2008), 64. "167 artists, scholars and scientists set out to explore and describe Egypt thoroughly. Their findings were published in a remarkable 23-volume work, *Description de l'Egypte*, which gave a detailed picture of the country and awakened Europe's interest in pharaonic Egypt. While the expeditions main aim was conquest, not scholarship, such finds as the Rosetta Stone, which eventually enabled historians to decipher hieroglyphics, added greatly to the understanding of ancient Egypt.

⁵ Goldschmidt, *Brief History of Egypt*, 68. "With the expanded army and factories came schools of engineering, medicine, midwifery, languages, administration, and even arts and crafts.

⁶ M. A. Faksh, "An Historical Survey of the Educational System in Egypt." *International Review of Education* 22, no. 2 (1976): 236. At the time of Muhamad Ali not more than five percent of the children between six and twelve years of age received any formal education at all.

his military system required a larger pool of educated Egyptians. Modern schools were opened, first at the secondary level and then at the elementary level, to meet the growing demand.⁷ “In all of these schools education was provided by foreign nationals who nearly unanimously could not speak the language of their pupils, be it Turkish or Arabic.”⁸ European influence would continue to impact Egyptian society through these schools and through a growing number of students who were sent abroad to study. In addition Muhamad Ali opened Egypt to Greeks, Italians and Armenians, “many of whom became shopkeepers, retailers, grocers, foreman, skilled laborers, carpenters and plumbers.”⁹ This influx of foreigners and the educational reforms would lead to significant changes in Egyptian society and the growth of a middle class.

The Coptic Church at the time of Muhamad Ali was continuing to suffer the same injustices they had throughout their history because of their minority status under Islamic rule. Ali had re-imposed dress codes for Copts and used financial benefits to encourage conversion to Islam. Some Copts had risen to prominence during this time period such as Mualem Ghali, Basileus Ghali, and Girgis El-Guhary, and Ali had to rely on a growing number of Coptic land-surveyors, tax collectors and scribes.¹⁰ The majority of Copts

⁷ Faksh, “Historical Survey of the Educational System,” 236. Muhamad Ali laid the foundation of what later developed into the primary school structure, beginning with the kindergarten and ending with the university, which was subject to foreign influence, especially French.

⁸ Samuel Tadros, *Motherland Lost: The Egyptian and Coptic Quest for Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2013), 79.

⁹ Hassan, *Christian Versus Muslim in Modern Egypt*, 33.

¹⁰ Otto Meinardus, *Two Thousand Years of Coptic Christianity* (Cairo: AUC, 1999), 69. “During the reign of Muhamad Ali the Copts gained an increasing sense of identity, and many Christians were able to develop their skills in business, commerce, and other professions. Though they remained a beleaguered

though were poorly educated and economically disadvantaged and were easily susceptible to incentives offered for conversion. They were also susceptible to a growing number of foreign missionaries entering Egypt in the early nineteenth century, both Catholic and Protestant. Their arrival in Egypt presented the greatest threat the Coptic Church had faced in centuries and their presence quickly aroused the concern and anger of Church leadership. Catholic and Protestant schools were opened in Alexandria and Cairo¹¹ and offered an attractive alternative to the primitive education offered elsewhere. “The Coptic Church was facing the onslaught of missionaries and at its disposal were few weapons to defend itself and its teachings.”¹²

Pope Kyrillios IV served as the Patriarch of Alexandria from 1854 to 1861 and became known as the “Father of Reform.” Prior to becoming pope, it is likely he had been influenced by the Anglican CMS (Church Mission Society), the first Protestant mission to Egypt in 1825.¹³ The mission focused on improving the condition of the Coptic Church rather than evangelism. The strategy of CMS was to improve the educational opportunities of Coptic clergy and lay people. By 1829 the CMS had started both a boys and girls school in Cairo and offered education in Arabic and English. The

minority, the proportion of Copts among the wealthy and the educated far surpassed their previous numbers.”

¹¹ Tadros, *Motherland Lost*, 85. Patrick Victor Elyas, *No Longer Dhimmis: How European Intervention in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries Empowered Copts in Egypt*, Thesis, CUREJ Electronic Journal, University of Pennsylvania, 2012, 32–33

¹² Tadros, *Motherland Lost*, 86.

¹³ Some suggest that Kyrillos had attended one of the CMS schools but this has not been proven. He did have a relationship with John Leider, the leader of CMS.

Coptic Institution was established by the CMS in 1943 to educate the Coptic clergy, many of whom were illiterate. Kyrillos had entered the Monastery of St. Antony at the age of twenty-two and after only two years was selected to be the abbot. He started a school and library in Beni Suef, an initiative unusual at the time for the abbot of a monastery. When he became pope in 1854 he established the first modern Coptic school in Cairo and would go on to establish five, including two for girls.¹⁴ Kyrillos is credited with helping to resurrect the Coptic language through these schools. His appreciation and concern for knowledge led him to import the first modern European printing press to Egypt and celebrated its arrival in Alexandria. “I am not honoring a machine made of iron. I am honoring the knowledge that will spread through it.”¹⁵ He is credited with helping to elevate the knowledge of Scripture among the clergy and established the Patriarchal Library in Cairo. These reforms instituted under Kyrillos were met with much opposition within the church, but their impact would be felt for years to come. “To be able to fully understand their future impact, one has only to realize that four of Egypt’s future prime ministers, two Copts and two Muslims, received their education at his Coptic schools.”¹⁶ These reforms would be necessary to counteract the growing number of foreign missionaries entering Egypt.

¹⁴ Tadros, *Motherland Lost*, 90. The first Egyptian girls school in the modern age was established by Pope Kyriillos IV.

¹⁵ Tadros, *Motherland Lost*, 91

¹⁶ Tadros, *Motherland Lost*, 92.

II. The American Mission to Egypt

The Presbyterians arrived in 1854, and unlike their Anglican predecessors, set their sights on evangelizing the masses, both Muslim and Orthodox Christians. These were American missionaries who brought with them more than the gospel; they brought American democracy and culture and a deep sense of manifest destiny. They were appalled at what they saw in the Coptic Church in the mid nineteenth century, both in its leadership and lay people.¹⁷ The Church was old, decrepit and devoid of spiritual life.¹⁸ Clergy were uneducated, often corrupt, and operated more by superstition than true spirituality. The missionaries had a strong belief in the Scriptures and a deep conviction that Bible reading would transform the society and build the church. Bible and literature distribution became their initial emphasis as they travelled up and down the Nile. They experienced immediate success in their distribution and established stations throughout the country, first in Alexandria and Cairo, and later in other towns and villages along the Nile. These stations would offer Sunday School and eventually churches were planted as Coptic Christians left their ancient Church for the more lively and spirited Protestant services.

Since Bible reading and literature distribution was the initial goal and emphasis, education and the establishment of schools became necessary to the mission. “The

¹⁷ Hassan, *Christian Versus Muslim in Modern Egypt*, 79. It was not unusual to see priests drinking alcohol and smoking. Yassa Hanna, a member of the Giza Sunday School, comments on the appalling condition of the church in rural areas and mentions that the peasants didn’t even realize when it was Easter. Oftentimes they would find the Church closed. “The priest had ended the mass early because he could not wait to get to his cigarette!”

¹⁸ Valor Christian Pickett, “Grace on the Nile: The American Presbyterian Mission in Egypt” (Master’s thesis, University of Arkansas, December 2007).

endeavor to educate Egyptians ... became the primary labor of the American Mission in Egypt.”¹⁹ “By 1878 the American Presbyterian church alone had opened thirty-five schools.”²⁰ Though not the first to open girls’ schools in Egypt, the mission greatly accelerated the pace of female education and had opened thirty-four schools for girls by 1896.²¹ The enrollment in these schools included Muslims, Christians and Jews, and Bible courses were a part of the curriculum. Near the end of the nineteenth century, in less than fifty years, the American Mission to Egypt had opened sixty-eight schools with a total enrollment of 11,014 students.²² This would lead to the opening of the American University in Cairo in 1914 and the American College for Girls in 1910.²³ The contribution the American Mission to Egypt made in the area of education in fifty years is staggering.

These schools enrolled 15,000 scholars in 1899, only slightly less than all government schools. Protestants gained the highest literacy rate in the land. By 1900 50% of the men and 20% of the women could read compared to the national average of 10% and 1%. Muslims too were being reached. Of the 16,771 students in 1908, 3,644 were Protestants, 3,495 Muslims and 8,547 Copts and others.²⁴

¹⁹ Pickett, “Grace on the Nile,” 68.

²⁰ Hassan, *Christian Versus Muslim in Modern Egypt*, 71.

²¹ Pickett, “Grace on the Nile,” 69.

²² Pickett, “Grace on the Nile,” 69.

²³ The name of the girls’ college would later be changed to Ramses Girls College following strained relations with the United States in 1967.

²⁴ Lyle L. Vander Werff, *Christian Mission to Muslims: The Record—Anglican and Reformed Approaches to India and the Near East, 1800–1938* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1977), 149.

Muhamad Ali was followed by Abbas, Sa'id and Ismail Pasha who ruled Egypt from 1848–1879. Sa'id, who began his governorship nearly the same time the Presbyterian missionaries arrived in 1854, and Ismail were both pro-western rulers and provided a political environment favorable to the American Mission. Educated by European tutors and fluent in French and English, Sa'id surrounded himself with westerners and was influenced by their culture and values. "His need to impress Europeans meant the rise of the influence of consuls who were able to exploit Sa'id's character to the benefit of their citizens."²⁵ He agreed to the Suez Canal project which opened the door to greater French and British involvement in Egypt. The Copts benefited from his need to impress Europeans by having "the last legal restrictions of *dhimmitude* [lifted] ... and the *jizya* was finally abolished."²⁶ Sa'id also permitted the Copts to renovate and build churches.

Khedive Ismail succeeded Sa'id in 1863 and continued opening Egypt to the West. He is considered Egypt's "first completely westernized ruler," and made the statement, "My country is no longer in Africa, it is in Europe."²⁷ Under Ismail's rule private land ownership led to the birth of the middle class in Egypt and an independent press was established. Ismail continued the reforms in education and numerous new government schools were opened. European schools in Egypt at this time had more than

²⁵ Tadros, *Motherland Lost*, 88. "The fixation on his image [in the eyes of Europeans] led to deliberate attempts to appear tolerant, modern and western, different from the image of the normal Eastern ruler at the time."

²⁶ Tadros, *Motherland Lost*, 88. *Dhimmitude* was the status of minorities under Islamic rule, and *jizya* was the tax that minorities had to pay for protection.

²⁷ Tadros, *Motherland Lost*, 93.

twelve thousand students, and the European population had increased from three thousand in 1836 to seventy-nine thousand in 1871.²⁸ American presence increased as well as former Union and Confederate officers were employed in the 1870s and General Charles Stone became the chief of the Egyptian General Staff.²⁹ The greatest benefit to the growing American Mission to Egypt was the increase in consular powers. American consular officials were able to help negotiate land for the missionaries and keep the Coptic Church and the Patriarch from diminishing their efforts. Pope Demetrius II and efforts by the Coptic hierarchy in 1862 to induce converts to Protestantism to return to the Coptic Church were met with appeals to the US and British consuls and the US Secretary of State. This battle between the two churches had been ongoing since the 1850s, but had reached a new level of intensity under Pope Demetrius II and the city of Asyut became ground zero.

Middle Egypt is the heart of Coptic Christianity and the city of Asyut is one of the largest Coptic bishoprics in Egypt. The success of the American Mission in this city was significant and quickly caught the attention of the Coptic clergy and bishop there.³⁰ A day

²⁸ Tadros, *Motherland Lost*, 95. By 1917 the number of students in French schools would increase to 24,000 and the foreign population to 260,000.

²⁹ Stanley H. Skreslet II, "The American Presbyterian Mission in Egypt: Significant Factors in Its Establishment," *American Presbyterians*, 64, no. 2 (Summer 1986): 91.

³⁰ Skreslet, "American Presbyterian Mission in Egypt," 85–86. A mission outpost was opened here in 1865 and proved to be a strategic and important decision for the American Mission to Egypt. Up to this point much of their work was focused on Cairo and Alexandria and the upper delta. "This move was a significant departure in strategy from that employed by all the missions which had preceded them ... the Roman Catholics had been present for two hundred years by 1840 but had erected church buildings only in Cairo and Alexandria. The Moravians had labored for almost fifty years in the eighteenth century primarily in Cairo ... the Church Missionary Society followed the Moravians in 1825." None had recognized the strategic importance of Asyut until 1865. "By 1895 it could be said that the mission was strongest in and around Asyut. Without a doubt, the decision to expand operations in the South, coupled as

school was opened by the missionaries in 1865 and grew to include a secondary school by 1870. The Asyut Training College came out of these efforts and had as its goal the training of pastors and church leaders. John Hogg vigorously promoted and spearheaded these efforts in Asyut and Dr. J.R. Alexander became the college's director.

John Hogg held that the most effective way to evangelize the whole country was to train an Egyptian Christian workforce ... He felt the Evangelical Church needed such a college to fulfill her mission in the land ... in the heartland of the indigenous (Coptic) church, the number of evangelical students seeking advanced training increased fourfold in two years, soon climbing to enrollments of 400 then 600.³¹

The numbers and results of this workforce in the heart of Coptic Christianity were alarming to the Coptic Church. It would be in Asyut that both Pope Demetrius and Demetrius II would focus their efforts to combat this threat to their flock.³² Years later it would be in Asyut where one of the centers of the Sunday School Movement would take root and grow in response to this threat.

it was with a decision to preach the Reformed faith primarily to the Copts was a pivotal move that paved the way for the phenomenal growth of the last three decades of the nineteenth century."

³¹ Skreslet, "American Presbyterian Mission in Egypt," 150. John R. Stott made this comment on the school in Assiut: "After visiting nearly all the missionary colleges and schools of importance in the non-Christian world, and studying their work and opportunities, I have no hesitation in saying that the Assiut Training College of Egypt is one of the most strategic in the world. In fact, I know of no other which has yielded larger practical results for the amount of money expended than this particular institution."

³² Meinardus, *Two Thousand Years of Coptic Christianity*, 71. "Demetrius, realizing the potential danger in the rapid growth of the Protestants, excommunicated the members of the heretical church, thereby creating a most unfortunate ecclesiastical atmosphere which to some extent has prevailed to this day." Skreslet, "American Presbyterian Mission in Egypt," 91. Demetrius II attempted to break up these schools established by the Protestants in Asyut after first trying to lure the Egyptian leaders back to the Coptic Church. "A scheme was worked out whereby the pupils of the American schools would no longer be exempt from the forced-labor conscriptions of the government, but the students attending Coptic schools would receive special certificates guaranteeing their exemption. One boy who refused to leave the American school was tortured with the bastinado. The Patriarch also threatened some Protestant sympathizers with banishment to the White Nile."

III. The Sunday School Movement

Very little has been written about this reform movement within the Coptic Church that began in the late 1800s and early 1900s. The most extensive research was done by Dr. Wolfram Weiss who wrote a Ph.D. thesis paper in German titled “History of the Coptic Orthodox Sunday School Movement.” Great lessons can be learned about how an ancient institution like the Coptic Church can respond to the numerous challenges, both internal and external, and return to its fundamental core principles and mission. The Coptic Church was weakened by clergy who were uneducated and underpaid and relied on selling their services in order to support their families. Clergy tended to be recruited from the lower class of society and oftentimes in towns and villages, parishes would pass from father to son.³³ The Church offered little in the way of theological education and training, and services were performed by rote and tradition. Corruption plagued both the church hierarchy and the priesthood and the growing frustration within the lay community was exacerbated by the success of Protestant and Catholic missionaries. It seemed to one outside observer that the lay people were more concerned about the Church than the clergy.³⁴ The Coptic Church was in crisis and in desperate need of reform. “The onslaught of foreign missionaries, the challenge of reforming an ancient

³³ Cornelis Hulsman, “Renewal in the Coptic Orthodox Church: Notes on the Ph.D. Thesis of Rev. Dr. Wolfram Reiss,” *Arab West Report*, November 22, 2002, accessed March 5, 2015, <http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2002/week-46/23-renewal-coptic-orthodox-church-notes-phd-thesis-revd-dr-wolfram-reiss>. “The majority of the priests had little or no theological education ... They knew the rituals and traditions from their fathers ... Many priests came from dynasties of priests who often served in the same parish where also their father, grandfather and great-grandfather had served as priest.”

³⁴ Hassan, *Christian Versus Muslim in Modern Egypt*, 73. One layman was quoted as saying, “We were very angry with the way things were ... the priests weren’t preaching, they didn’t visit the people, they didn’t keep records.”

institution, the impact of the modernizing state, and the clash between the clergy and the laymen were hallmarks of that modern crisis.”³⁵

Habib Girgis³⁶ recognized the need to provide education to the youth in the Coptic Church to prevent their conversion to another faith, particularly the Protestants. Changes in the education system in the mid to late 1800s resulted in less religious instruction in the schools, leaving Coptic youth with little understanding of their own faith.³⁷ Girgis was educated in a Coptic school and received theological training at the newly reopened Coptic Theological Seminary in Cairo in 1893.³⁸ He later became a teacher there and eventually became dean of the seminary.³⁹ Initially he focused his efforts on improving the education of Coptic priests and church leaders in the seminary and encouraging Christian education in the public and private schools. The resistance and

³⁵ Tadros, *Motherland Lost*, 29.

³⁶ Meinardus, *Two Thousand Years of Coptic Christianity*, 63. Habib Girgis succeeded Yusef Manqariyus as director of the Coptic Theological Seminary in Cairo, wrote altogether more than thirty books, the best known of which are his Dogmatic Theology, The Mystery of Godliness, The Seven Sacraments of the Church, and Practical Ways to Reform the Coptic Church. Through his religious education lessons for primary and secondary schools, he left a lasting impression on the Coptic Church, especially because of his poetry and hymns, some of which are even sung in the Coptic Evangelical Church.

³⁷ Hulsman, “Renewal in the Coptic Orthodox Church.” Teachers of the government schools as well as students at Coptic schools no longer had a (sufficient) Christian religious education. In some khedive (government) schools, Coptic students were even pressured to participate in Islamic religious education.

³⁸ Rodolph Yanney, “Light in the Darkness: Life of Archdeacon Habib Guirguis,” *Coptic Church Review* 5, no. 2 (Summer 1984), 48. An article in the Coptic Church Review reveals the sad state of the Coptic Church in the late nineteenth century. When the Theological Seminary was reopened in 1893, there was no one qualified to teach religion or theology. The president, Youssef Bey Mankarios, was not a theologian. Efforts were made to locate a qualified professor and there was even a suggestion to hire a Protestant teacher of religion. The seminary went four years without a teacher of religion and theology before one was finally hired, but it was soon discovered that his knowledge of Orthodoxy was weak and he was fired. While still a student, Habib Girgis was hired to teach religion and theology.

³⁹ Hulsman, “Renewal in the Coptic Orthodox Church.”

opposition to the latter, from both Muslims and conservative Coptic leaders, led to the formation of Sunday Schools.⁴⁰ “This opposition from Coptic clergy resulted in the first Sunday Schools being supported by organizations of laymen only.”⁴¹

Girgis borrowed from the Protestant and Catholic methods of religious instruction and developed lively lessons, introduced illustrations and used the question-answer approach to teaching youth. He began publishing the magazine, *Karma*, in 1904 to reach a wider audience. It wasn’t until 1918 that Girgis’s initiative was organized and a Sunday School committee was formed to coordinate religious instruction throughout Egypt for Coptic youth. A standard curriculum was developed which included Bible lessons, Coptic rites and history, and the lives of Egyptian saints and martyrs.⁴² What started with a handful of students in 1908 became a movement of nearly 42,000 students by the mid-1940s.

As Girgis was beginning to address the educational reforms needed in the Coptic Church, the British were occupying Egypt. British occupation began in 1882 in response to the financial crisis under Ismail and in an effort to protect their interest in the Suez Canal. Nationalist movements began forming in Egypt in the 1890s opposing the increased influence of foreigners in the country. Riots in Alexandria threatened the large

⁴⁰ Hulsman, “Renewal in the Coptic Orthodox Church.” “The implementation of Christian education not only faced difficulties from the (Muslim) government, but also from the conservative parts of the Coptic community itself.” Some priests viewed this initiative as too Western and influenced by the Presbyterian American Mission and some were threatened by this intrusion and interference into their sphere of responsibility.

⁴¹ Hassan, *Christian Versus Muslim in Modern Egypt*, 73. “The initiative for reform of the Orthodox Church came from the lay members of the congregation ... [who] liked to think that they were inspired by the example of the catechistic school of Alexandria, which they saw as the origin of their own Sunday School movement.”

⁴² Hassan, *Christian Versus Muslim in Modern Egypt*, 74.

expatriate community there and Egypt was on the edge of chaos. Lord Cromer was sent by the British government to bring order, protect British citizens and economic interests, and institute reforms that would prevent the financial crisis from continuing. Initially thought to be a short affair, Lord Cromer stayed for twenty-four years and the British occupation lasted for over fifty years.

The Wafd party was formed in the early twentieth century after WWI and included both Muslims and Copts who came together to oppose the British occupation and demand sovereignty. “It was the first time in the history of Egypt that cross and crescent appeared on the same flag.”⁴³ The Copts proudly displayed their patriotism and contributed significantly to the national fight for independence. The revolution against British rule in 1919 led to a declaration of independence in 1922 and Egyptians were given more control of the government. One immediate result of this control was a renewed emphasis on education. More government resources were allocated to public education and higher learning.⁴⁴ The university graduates who formed the leadership of the Sunday School movement in the late 1930s and early 1940s were the beneficiaries of this renewed emphasis. Many of these Sunday School leaders were also influenced and involved in the Wafd party and the politics of their day, including Matta El-Meskeen. He

⁴³ Meinardus, *Two Thousand Years of Coptic Christianity*, 76.

⁴⁴ M. K. Harby and M. El-Hadi Affifi. “Education in Modern Egypt.” *International Review of Education* 4, no. 4 (1958): 430. “In 1925 some of the higher schools were reorganized and formed the Egyptian University (now the Cairo University). In 1942 the University of Alexandria was established, in 1950 Ain-Shams University was founded in Cairo, and Asyut University more recently.”

along with others would eventually break away from politics being disillusioned by the leadership of the various factions.⁴⁵

One of his [Matta] main observations from this period was how the various political parties used students in their quarrel. He came to see the political hero as a man who exploits youth, enslaving their minds and fashioning in them an idol of himself, all the while telling them he is liberating them.⁴⁶

It was shortly after leaving the Wafd Party that Matta would be introduced to the Sunday School in Giza.

The heartland of Coptic Christianity in Asyut where the Protestant mission had enjoyed so much success became the center of revival in the 1920s and 1930s as a result of the Sunday School activities there.⁴⁷ Fewer Coptic Christians were leaving the fold in this governorate as the young were inspired by the religious instruction and heritage of their ancient Church. As these young people from Asyut traveled to Cairo for university studies in Giza, they took the fires of revival with them and established Sunday School centers, providing the same activities and instruction they had received in Asyut.⁴⁸ “Their

⁴⁵ Tadros, *Motherland Lost*, 136. Disillusionment with politics not only affected Coptic Christians but Muslims and secularists as well. The struggle to rid Egypt from British interference and control had failed following the declaration of independence in 1922. Democracy and liberalism had also failed in the eyes of many and new forms of government were being considered, including dictatorship and totalitarianism. “It was during these years that Hassan Al-Banna was building the first bricks of his Muslim Brotherhood and Ahmed Hussein was founding his Young Egypt.”

⁴⁶ Farouk T. K. Bector, “Union with Christ in the Work of Matta El-Meskeen” (ThM thesis, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1995), 4.

⁴⁷ Meinardus, *Two Thousand Years of Coptic Christianity*, 93. “One of the first Sunday Schools was established in the thirties in Asyut, undoubtedly motivated by the successful missionary and educational work of the American Presbyterians in Upper Egypt.”

⁴⁸ Hassan, *Christian Versus Muslim in Modern Egypt*, 75. In the late 1930s a group of Coptic students from Cairo University began to hold regular meetings on Wednesday and Thursday for university students.

activities led to the creation of the most important centers in Cairo.”⁴⁹ These centers would be located at St. Antony’s Church in Shubra, St. Mark’s Church in Giza, St. George’s Church in Gezirat Badran and St. Michael’s Church in Tusun.

Almost all of the young men who joined the monasteries in the Wadi El-Natrun, the Monastery of St. Samuel in Qalamun, or the hermitages in the Wadi El-Rayyan had originated in one of these four Sunday Schools. The character of the Sunday Schools had impressed itself so strongly on its members that their future roles as church leaders were largely determined by the theology and piety of their Sunday Schools. This is evident in the lives of Pope Shenuda III (Nazir Ghayed) from St. Antony’s Sunday School and Abuna Matta El-Meskeen (Yousef Iskander) from the Sunday School in Giza.⁵⁰

Members of the Sunday School movement were deeply rooted in the middle class, independent from the clergy and were a product of the educational reforms of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They provided the church with its first group of university-educated leadership. Efforts had been made to reform the Coptic Church from without, both by the Anglican mission and by upper class laymen in the late nineteenth century⁵¹ but these efforts were unsuccessful. The Sunday School leaders had a different

⁴⁹ Hulsman, “Renewal in the Coptic Orthodox Church.”

⁵⁰ Meinardus, *Two Thousand Years of Coptic Christianity*, 95.

⁵¹ Meinardus, *Two Thousand Years of Coptic Christianity*, 71. The *Maglis al-milli* (the religious council) was first elected in 1874 and consisted of twelve laymen and twelve submembers. They were elected by the people every five years and were to share with the patriarchate “the burden of supervising the financial and civil affairs of the Copts.” This threatened the authority of the clergy and church hierarchy who wanted to administer the affairs of the church without interference from the laity. Conflict was an ongoing result of the formation of this council and the *Maglis al-milli* accomplished very little to reform the church.

strategy; to change the church from within by infiltrating the ranks of the clergy, the monasteries and eventually the papacy itself.⁵²

What the Sunday School Movement wanted to achieve was not just the maintenance of church dogmas and the defense of church values ... they set out in the 1940's and early 1950's to conquer the religious spaces in which this new identity could be forged, they overran successively the seminaries, then the monasteries and finally they took by assault that last bastion of conservatism, the papacy itself ... I would call it a revolution, because it did not merely involve the replacement of the old guard by a new generation, but the creation of something totally new.⁵³

By bringing new blood into the leadership, beginning at the diaconal level, they hoped to cleanse the church of corruption and subvert the systems of power and abuse. "Their dream was to return the Church to its third century aura."⁵⁴

The Coptic Church's rich history goes back to the founding of the church in Alexandria by St. Mark in the year 68 CE. Tradition credits Mark with bringing the gospel to Egypt and suffering martyrdom by an angry mob of pagans in the city of Alexandria. The city, already an intellectual center, became one of the five patriarchal cities of early Christianity, along with Jerusalem, Antioch, Constantinople and Rome. The catechetical school in Alexandria was the most renowned intellectual and spiritual center for the defense of the Christian faith and development of theology. Clement, Origin, and Athanasius are but a few of the theologians and church leaders from Alexandria who made significant contributions to the early Christian church. Persecution

⁵² Hassan, *Christian Versus Muslim in Modern Egypt*, 79. "The entrance of educated laymen into the ranks of priesthood brought about a change ... that was as profound in its effects on adult members of the congregation as the introduction of SS had been on its children."

⁵³ Hassan, *Christian Versus Muslim in Modern Egypt*, 259.

⁵⁴ Hassan, *Christian Versus Muslim in Modern Egypt*, 61.

under various emperors led to the martyrdom of a vast number of Christians in Egypt. Following one of the most severe persecutions under Diocletian in 303, “Egyptian Christianity emerged victorious and dynamic, so much so that its theology and Christology were to leave a lasting impression on the whole church.”⁵⁵ Outside of Alexandria in the deserts of Egypt, Antony, Macarius, and Pachomias were laying the foundation for Christian asceticism and monasticism. The desert fathers, through their lives and the writings that came out of the desert, would influence Christianity both in the East and the West for centuries to come.

This rich history, buried and hidden much like the archaeological treasures of ancient Egypt under the sands of the desert, were what the twentieth century Sunday School leaders were digging to recover.

The stories about Egypt’s saints and martyrs, legendary local figures like the bandit Black Moses and the boy-martyr Abanoub, constituted the staple diet of all their growing years, and the sayings of the church fathers collected in a book called *The Monks Paradise* (Bustan al-Rahban) which was read to the monks aloud at mealtime in the refectories, inspired and shaped their manhood.⁵⁶

Their university education gave them an appreciation for academics and learning and helped unite modernity and ancient history to give the Coptic Christians a new sense of identity. Some were encouraged to continue their studies in the West to learn Greek and better translate the church fathers directly from Greek to Arabic. Those who served the Sunday School centers were intellectual activists and encouraged the involvement of all

⁵⁵ Meinardus, *Two Thousand Years of Coptic Christianity*, 38. In the Coptic calendar the years are dated from *anno martyrum* (A.M.), the ‘year of the martyrs’ “which recalls the great persecution of the Christians that began in Egypt in 303.

⁵⁶ Hassan, *Christian Versus Muslim in Modern Egypt*, 82.

members of the church in rediscovering its roots. “Without this digging for its roots (ancient hymns, church fathers and Coptic language) the Orthodox Sunday School movement would have been merely a mediocre imitation of the West’s Protestant Sunday School.”⁵⁷

The Sunday School movement gave the Coptic Church a “theologically literate laity which would be the envy of many churches.”⁵⁸ Not only were they well educated, they were dedicated and committed with an enthusiasm and zeal for reform.⁵⁹ In villages and towns throughout Egypt, Sunday School activists visited homes and gathered children and youth for instruction. They were shocked to find the neglect of parish priests, empty churches, and no commitment or dedication among the clergy. The center in Giza, surrounded by these rural areas, had established over three hundred local branches in upper and lower Egypt, and by the 1950s over nine hundred towns and four hundred villages had Sunday School centers. Hassan compares these activists with Nasser’s revolution in the 1950s as both were trying to bring reform and change to corrupt systems.

[Nasser’s] dream of a social revolution was aborted because, short of grassroots participation, the junta was forced to rely on a coercive machinery to see the implementation of their projects. This inevitably led to abuses of power and corruption. The leaders of the movement of church reform, unlike those of the Free Officers Movement, were able to call on a

⁵⁷ Hassan, *Christian Versus Muslim in Modern Egypt*, 78.

⁵⁸ John H. Watson, *Among the Copts* (Portland, OR: Sussex Academic, 2002), 133.

⁵⁹ Tadros, *Motherland Lost*, 155. “They were not illiterate adherents who followed the clergy blindly, but instead some of the best minds Egypt had to offer. They were the products of the modern education system, middle-class university graduates from all fields—engineering, medical doctors, and pharmacists—people who had bright careers ahead of them, yet their hearts and minds were drawn to the Coptic Church ... their goal was the revival of their church and returning it to its old glory.”

second rank of volunteers, devoted *khuddam* cadres, ready for self-sacrifice.⁶⁰

Though conflict between these young reformers and the clergy remained, by the late 1940s the church could no longer ignore the growth and influence of this movement.⁶¹ The Sunday School centers had unified in 1941, held the first Sunday School congress and in 1947 began publication of the Sunday School Magazine. In addition to Bible instruction and Coptic history, the magazine included articles criticizing the corruption of clergy, the abuse of power and the need for reform.

The focus of the magazine was on church reform: cleaning the house of God, liberation from all powers, clergy and laymen who had made the church a market where only money, power and influence counted. The practices of simony were publicly rejected and the servants called for the right of the lay people to choose their pastors.⁶²

Pope Yusab II was elected in 1946 and two years later he recognized the Sunday School centers as part of the church, more to control them than in any interest at church reform. This recognition did little to diminish the struggle between the clergy and the laymen of the Sunday Schools. The latter were determined to see their leadership appointed to positions within the church. A growing number of activists had been

⁶⁰ Hassan, *Christian Versus Muslim in Modern Egypt*, 83. Nasser's attempt to reform Egypt failed because it focused on institutional changes and importing western science and technology without changing values and cultural underpinnings. The Sunday School Movement aimed at changing people first and then the institution.

⁶¹ Tadros, *Motherland Lost*, 137. The nation of Egypt in the 1940s was witnessing the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood and was turning away from the western influence, being disillusioned by liberalism and democracy. Socialism and Nasser's revolution were on the horizon. "Egypt's eyes were no longer set on Paris, but instead focused on the East." Coptic influence in the politics of the nation was diminishing and persecution was on the rise. Violence was directed towards Coptic churches and priests and attacks became more frequent and severe.

⁶² Hulsman, "Renewal in the Coptic Orthodox Church."

ordained priests⁶³ and the first three educated laymen had entered the monasteries; these three were Yusef Iskander (Matta El-Meskeen), Saad Aziz (Father Macari)⁶⁴ and Nazir Gayyed (Father Antony, who would later become Pope Shenuda). Infiltration had begun and it would only be a matter of time before the reformers reached the highest levels of the Coptic Church.

The three men entering the monasteries represented the two main Sunday School centers in Cairo. Nazir Gayyed came from the center in Shubra at St. Antony's Church and both Yusef Iskander and Saad Aziz came from St. Mark's Church in Giza. Both centers had their own unique distinctions and differing thoughts on reformation. The center in Shubra was founded by Zareef Abdallah (note 61) and Father Boutros and emphasized the spirituality of the individual. Father Boutros practiced a strict asceticism and imposed a rigorous discipline of fasting, prayer, celebrating the liturgy and studying the church fathers and monastic traditions. The center was more inward focused, avoided politics, community affairs and social outreach. The center in Giza was more outward focused and socially active. Giza is located on the western side of Cairo and surrounded by rural areas and villages where many Christians lived in poverty. It was to these

⁶³ Hulsman, "Renewal in the Coptic Orthodox Church." "Iskander worked in 1948 to have Sunday School pioneer Zareef Abdallah consecrated as priest in Damanhour. Abdallah became the first Sunday School pioneer to become priest."

⁶⁴ Anthony O'Mahony, "Tradition at the Heart of Renewal: The Coptic Orthodox Church and Monasticism in Modern Egypt," *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 7, no. 3 (2007): 168. Nazir Gayyed held a B.A. in History from the University of Cairo and a B.D. from the Theological Seminary, Yusef Iskander held a B.A. in Pharmacy and Saad Aziz held a B.A. in Theology and Pedagogy, and M.A. in Law from the University of Cairo, and would later complete an M.A. at Princeton University.

Christians that the Sunday School leaders combined Bible instruction with humanitarian assistance and pastoral care.

The Sunday School leaders in Giza believed the church should go to the people and not the other way around. Students were encouraged to reach out to those Christians the church had not reached. In serving the villages it became clear that they could not limit themselves to religious education only. The social, economic, medical and general educational needs of the villages were so obvious and deep that they had to offer help in these areas. This experience led to the understanding that spiritual needs are connected to social and material needs.⁶⁵

Giza was also the location of Cairo University and many of the Sunday School servants (*khuddam*) were students at the university. Upon completion of their degrees they returned home and “exported the idea of the Sunday Schools to their hometowns and villages in Upper Egypt.”⁶⁶ By the 1940s nearly three hundred Sunday Schools were linked with the center in Giza.

In 1956 following the death of Pope Yusab II, three of the names put forward for the election of the new pope were from the Sunday School movement: Nazir Gayyed (Father Antony), Yusef Iskander (Matta El-Meskeen) and Saad Aziz (Father Samuel). Fearing that these reformers would take over, the church leadership changed the rules and required a papal candidate to be at least forty years of age. Father Mina Mutawahhid Al-Baramusi was elected and became Pope Cyril VI in 1959. Father Mina had spent much of his life since the age of twenty-five in the monastery and felt called to the solitary life. He was sympathetic to the Sunday School movement and had established a relationship with

⁶⁵ Hulsman, “Renewal in the Coptic Orthodox Church.”

⁶⁶ Hulsman, “Renewal in the Coptic Orthodox Church.”

Saad Aziz and the center in Giza. “Father Mina combined a traditional Coptic spirituality with an openness to youth who wanted to renew the church.”⁶⁷ It would be to Father Mina in Old Cairo that Yusef Iskander and Saad Aziz would go in 1948 to be consecrated the first monks from the Sunday School movement.

Nazir Gayyed would become a monk six years later in 1954 and entered the Monastery of the Syrians. Before this he was active in the Sunday School centers at St. Antony’s Church and St. Michaels Church as a teacher and leader and eventually became editor of the *Sunday School Magazine* in 1950. He took the name Father Antony and became a disciple of Matta El-Meskeen at the Monastery of the Syrians. In 1962 Pope Cyril VI promoted him to Bishop of Higher Clerical Education, a position that included the seminaries and the Sunday School Centers. He “reinvigorated Coptic seminary education, starting in the early 1960s, and the number of students studying theology increased threefold.”⁶⁸ In 1972, following the death of Cyril VI, he was elected Pope Shenouda and became the first of the Sunday School leaders to reach the papacy of the Coptic Church. He continued his emphasis on theological education and developing church leadership and the statistics are staggering: “Only about 500 students graduated from seminary from 1900–1961. More than 2300 graduated from seminary from 1961–1994.”⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Hulsman, “Renewal in the Coptic Orthodox Church.”

⁶⁸ Cornelis Hulsman, “Reviving an Ancient Faith: Two Strong-Willed Reformers Bring Orthodoxy Back to Life,” *Christianity Today*, December 3, 2001, 39.

⁶⁹ Hulsman, “Reviving an Ancient Faith,” 39.

The growth of the Coptic Church worldwide over the past fifty years has been phenomenal and largely a result of emigration due to political pressures and economic opportunities. Caring for the diaspora fell into the hands of Bishop Samuel (Saad Aziz) who traveled extensively to organize Coptic communities in the United States, Europe and Australia. In the 1960s Coptic priests were first sent out to Toronto, Germany, Kuwait and Australia, and by the early 1970s churches were established in Jersey City and Los Angeles. A few years later Father Salib Suryal had established seven Coptic churches in Germany and a Coptic monastery.⁷⁰ The number of churches in the United States had grown from seventeen in 1976 to fifty-seven in 1995, and in the same year there were twenty-three Coptic churches in Australia.

Today the Coptic Church has a whopping 202 churches in the United States, fifty-one in Canada, forty-seven in Australia and twenty-nine in the United Kingdom. More than a hundred churches are spread across Europe in Germany, the Netherlands, France, Austria, Italy, Sweden, Denmark, Switzerland, Ireland and Hungary. In Asia and Oceania, there are churches in Japan, New Zealand, Fiji, Thailand, Singapore, Hong Kong, China, Malaysia, South Korea, Taiwan, and Pakistan. Today there also Coptic churches in Brazil and Bolivia, each with its own bishop. The Coptic Church is no longer just the Church of Egypt, but it is now a worldwide church that serves its adherents across the globe.⁷¹

Missionary activity was carried out on the African continent in the 1970s leading to the establishment of sixty-five Coptic Churches in places like South Africa, Botswana,

⁷⁰ Tadros, *Motherland Lost*, 176.

⁷¹ Tadros, *Motherland Lost*, 177. Pope Shenouda was faced with the challenge of keeping Westernized Copts within the church. He was concerned especially for the youth and often said, “A church without youth is a church without a future.”

Ghana, Nigeria, Namibia and numerous other African countries. “Today more than half a million Africans in sub-Saharan Africa belong to the Coptic Church.”⁷²

Monastic reform began under Cyril VI with the appointment of the educated young monks to the Monasteries of St. Samuel and the Syrians. In the 1950s the university-educated monks were only accepted at the Monastery of the Syrians. Matta El-Meskeen became the spiritual father of these reformers, including Father Samuel and Father Antony, after the first publication of his book, *The Orthodox Prayer Life*, in 1952. This was the time of Nasser’s revolution in Egypt and the new government’s land reclamation project brought the monasteries closer to the people. New roads were built connecting the monasteries in the desert with the rest of Egypt and visits became more frequent by the lay people to the various monastic communities.⁷³ *Bayt el Khilwa* (House of Retreat) was established at this time encouraging young men to visit the monasteries and participate with the monks in their daily prayers and work life. In 1958 Matta El-Meskeen helped to establish *Bayt El Takris* (House of Consecration), a community of laymen who committed themselves to celibacy and poverty, the study of the church fathers and service to the church. Monastic reform reestablished healthy communities of monks as young educated recruits were added in growing numbers.⁷⁴ The importance of

⁷² Tadros, *Motherland Lost*, 179.

⁷³ Otto Meinardus, *Monks and Monasteries of the Egyptian Desert* (Cairo: AUC, 1992), x. “The most significant change to the monastic life was effected by the construction of desert roads leading to the monasteries, thus lifting the desert fathers out of there geographic isolation ... for the first time in their sixteen hundred years of history, the desert monasteries are woven into the fabric of the parish churches of the cities, towns and villages.”

⁷⁴ Meinardus, *Monks and Monasteries*, x. “Thirty years ago when I set out to gather material for the first edition, the overwhelming majority of the monks were fifty years of age or older. Today, the majority of monks are academically trained young men between twenty-five and forty.”

this for the Coptic Church cannot be understated, for it is from the monasteries that the bishops and Patriarchs are chosen. During the time of Muhamad Ali's rule in the early 1800s in Egypt, there were only seven functioning monasteries. Today there are twenty-four. In addition two Coptic monasteries have been established in Europe, two in Australia and one in both the United States and Canada.⁷⁵ Meinardus shows the numerical increase over the past twenty-five years of monks at various monasteries in Egypt:⁷⁶

Monastery	1960	1986
St. Antony	24	69
St. Paul	22	40
El-Baramus	20	83
Macarius	12	105
St. Bishoi	12	115
Syrian	28	55
St. Samuel	20	46
Mina	6	30

IV. Summary

Modernization in Egypt in the nineteenth century led to both an influx of Europeans and Americans and a new emphasis on education. These two factors of immigration and education were the most significant to the growth of the Sunday School movement in the early twentieth century and the revival in the Coptic Church. Both secular and religious schools were being established in Egypt, first under Muhammad Ali

⁷⁵ Meinardus, *Two Thousand Years of Coptic Christianity*, 81.

⁷⁶ Meinardus, *Monks and Monasteries*, x.

and the Anglican CMS, and later by American Protestant missionaries representing the Presbyterian Church. The Coptic Church, in desperate need of reform, could no longer ignore the success of Protestant and Catholic missionaries as large numbers of Coptic Christians converted and left the church. Changes in the educational system by the government in the late 1800s combined with the missionary threat to the Coptic Church led Habib Guirgis to begin Sunday School classes in Cairo for the youth. His efforts were welcomed by the laity but considered too Western, intrusive and threatening to the Coptic church hierarchy. The Sunday School movement began to grow in the early 1900s and eventually led to a revival in the city of Asyut, one of the largest bishoprics in Egypt. As the young people traveled from Asyut to Cairo for university studies, they carried the fires of revival with them and the Sunday School centers in Giza and Shubra were established. From these centers would come the first three university educated monks, Matta El-Meskeen, Father Macari and Father Antony. These three would have an enormous impact on the Coptic Church and influence numerous students to enter monastic life and fill the ranks of the clergy. In a short period of time their goal of infiltrating from within the clergy, the monasteries and the papacy with reformers from the Sunday School movement would be accomplished with the election of Father Antony as Pope Shenouda in 1972. The restoration of the Coptic Church to its third century aura was the ultimate aim of the reform movement.⁷⁷ This was accomplished primarily

⁷⁷*Abuna Matta El-Meskeen: A Biography* (St. Macarius Publishing, 2008), 52. Matta's call to the monastery led him and Saad Aziz in 1948 to Father Mina in Cairo. The three along with Father Boulis Boulis had 'a deeply spiritual meeting' together. "In it they expressed their hope that Father Mina would be father to a monasticism that restores the glory of the first Church; a monasticism removed from positions of importance and money."

through the rediscovery of the patristic writings of the early church fathers and a return to core values and “true north” principles.

CHAPTER 5:

FATHER MATTA EL-MESKEEN

We present to you the life of our blessed Father Matta El-Meskeen. God raised him up as a sign in this generation, and not only a sign but also an example model, guide and teacher of the Christian life in general and the monastic life in particular.¹

My only job is to love God and to bring myself pleasure in this love! This until now is the theme of my life.

—Abuna Matta El-Meskeen

I. The Life of Matta El-Meskeen

A. Early Life

Matta El-Meskeen, was born in Benha, Egypt, in 1919 as Yousef Iskander. Raised in a conservative Coptic Christian home in relative poverty as one of eight children, he enjoyed the strong support and godly influence of both his father and mother.² His mother died of illness when Matta was fifteen, and he went to live with relatives in Alexandria. Here in this cosmopolitan city he learned to play the violin and developed his talent at drawing. He returned home to complete his secondary education and graduated first in his class in 1940. Matta entered Cairo University at the age of nineteen and received a degree in pharmacology in 1944. During his time in Cairo he joined the Wafd party with the hope of an Egypt that was united and free from sectarianism and colonial

¹ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen: A Biography* (St. Macarius Publishing, 2008), Preface.

² Farouk T. K. Bector, “Union with Christ in the Work of Matta El-Meskeen” (ThM thesis, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1995), 2. Matta remembers as a young boy entering his mother’s prayer closet and watching her pray. “In time he came to love prayers as she did. And so, from almost as far back as he can remember, his mother trained him in the practice of an Orthodox prayer life.”

powers.³ Nationalism was on the rise and the university campus was an ideal location to form a new Egyptian identity, but Matta had become disillusioned with politics as he saw the leaders were exploiting rather liberating the youth. “One of his main observations from this period was how the various political parties used the students in the quarrel.”⁴ His exposure to the Sunday School movement began and steadily increased following his departure from the Wafd party. The Sunday School was a positive influence on his life and helped shape his identity at a critical time. Matta’s participation in the Sunday School would eventually involve preaching and ministry to the surrounding villages around Giza. His feelings toward Protestants and others outside the Coptic Church were expressed during one of the youth meetings and a disagreement he had with a Sunday School leader. The leader told the group that it was wrong to have any dealings with Protestants and Matta voiced his objection, saying “God does not teach us to be separate in that way.”⁵ This event was a shock to Matta and caused him to reflect on the way leaders, whether academic, political or religious, tend to cause and perpetuate conflict.

He saw youth blindly following shallow leaders undeserving of their trust, leaders who robbed them of their true vision. Each leader sought to force his own opinions on his pupils, preying on their sincerity and naivety and thus enslaving them. And this he saw as the disaster of his generation. He longed for a leader who was both transparently honest and truly free.⁶

³ The rise of the Muslim Brotherhood and the continued British occupation of Egypt led many Coptic youth, including Matta, to join the Wafd party. Freedom from outside influence and Western powers included a desire for the the Coptic Church to return to its pure theology and patristic heritage.

⁴ Boctor, “Union with Christ,” 4. Matta came to see “the political hero as a man who exploits youth, enslaving their minds and fashioning in them an idol of himself, all the while telling them he is liberating them.”

⁵ Boctor, “Union with Christ,” 6.

⁶ Boctor, “Union with Christ,” 6.

After graduation Matta fulfilled his obligation to serve under government orders in the Sinai for six months⁷ and shortly afterwards opened his own pharmacy in the city of Damanhour. He quickly established himself as a hardworking and honest business owner and built a flourishing and successful business. Matta was well known for his kindness and compassion to both his clients and his competitors and contributed generously from his profits to the poor, the church and the Sunday School. Despite the growing success of the pharmacy, his heart was restless in what he considered empty and worldly pursuits. He longed for something deeper. “Where can I find you, O God? I’ve searched for you and not found you in science, in politics, nor in the fanaticism of religious men, nor in the money, which is now beginning to fill my treasury. Where can I find you?”⁸

Freedom from the world, money, people, and success was his heart’s desire as he saw these things stealing his time away from worship, prayer and Bible reading.⁹ “I loved Christ and I wanted to leave everything and follow him.”¹⁰ The money and business held

⁷ Boctor, “Union with Christ,” 8–9. University graduates in Egypt were given orders by the government to serve in their respective field for a certain period of time and in a specific location. Many graduates disregarded these orders. The director in the Ministry of Health was surprised at Matta’s willingness to comply and arranged to meet him. Matta “explained to him that he accepted for no other reason than that he respected government orders and was willing to go anywhere.” Initially Matta was assigned to a remote location on the Sudanese border but instead served in the Sinai near Jabal El-Tor. This was his first experience at the age of twenty-five living in the desert region.

⁸ Boctor, “Union with Christ,” 10.

⁹ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 34. “I wept constantly because the world gobbled up my time, in hours, weeks, months, then years.”

¹⁰ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 33.

little control over Matta, and he lived meagerly despite his financial success. Repeatedly he refers to the people in his life and the opposition he faced:

People got attached to me to an unhealthy degree.¹¹

I wanted to break free, but more and more people gathered around me ... the more I wanted to break free, the more I found them gathered around me and I was bound with a hundred straps.¹²

My acquaintances, however, kept warning me and terrifying me saying, "Monasticism? Don't you dare do that to yourself! ... They will wear you out and humiliate you, and you will not find a way or place to find rest."¹³

As for the perspective of others, there was my father who was a spiritual person but who was very upset; he wept and described to me how difficult monasticism is. One of the older monks also presented monasticism to me as an extremely difficult path. They all warned me of its pains and trials.¹⁴

On the other side of this struggle was the call of God and the work of the Holy Spirit: "Yet there was always a powerful pull within my heart toward Christ that I never managed to extinguish."¹⁵ The struggle reached a climax and Matta gave himself six months to break free and asked God for help.¹⁶ The opposition during this time increased,

¹¹ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 33.

¹² *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 34.

¹³ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 34.

¹⁴ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 45.

¹⁵ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 33.

¹⁶ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 64. Chapter 4 of the biography relates visions and dreams that Matta had during this critical time. "The personal revelations were face to face with Christ, and I have experienced them twice in my life. Both times I was on the verge of taking critical decisions, and He came to bless them and to give me deep peace." Boctor, "Union with Christ," 11, note 7. "We should note that dreams and visions have the same place in the Coptic tradition as they have in the Book of Acts. That is to say, relative to dreams and visions, the Coptic tradition sees no break (with the completion of the biblical canon) between the Apostolic Age and the present, as is the standard Reformed position. Hence, it has no teaching which would prevent their being accepted today as God-given. On the other hand, Copts would want to judge the validity of a believer's dreams or ecstatic visions on the basis of Scripture and the

as did his determination, until he finally sold everything, left his apartment and all that he owned, “turned his back on the world” and followed the call of God to monastic life.¹⁷

Spiritual pressure kept growing at the core of my being, and my awareness of eternal life deepened until finally my ultimate preference became clear. It was between, on the one hand staying in the world, selling and buying, amassing wealth and providing for a family, and, on the other hand, flying into the expansive welcome of God, loving, rejoicing, knowing and growing unhindered. All the obstacles, and they were enormous and terrifying, could not stop me from flying away, so I went to the monastery.¹⁸

At the time of Matta’s calling, monasticism in Egypt was in decline and most of the monks were illiterate and came from among the poor and uneducated. Matta was the first college graduate of his generation, a pioneer of sorts, to enter the monastery.¹⁹

Matta would describe his monastic vocation as a divine calling, motivated by a love for Christ and a deep desire to worship and serve Him wholeheartedly. His departure from the world and flight to the desert was understood as an exodus. Much as the children of Israel were set free from the slavery in Egypt, Matta felt himself freed from the attachments of the world, from self and from others. He described his initial obedience to the call through biblical references; mentioning Abraham and his departure from land, nation and tribe; quoting Jas 4:4—the love of this world is enmity toward

teachings of the Church: that is, they would not be considered equal to Scripture, in terms of their normative value.”

¹⁷ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 11. Matta viewed this period as the most critical in his life; the struggle against family, friends and material success eventually gave way to obedience and a new sense of freedom “to make his exodus from the realm of men that he might live in God alone.”

¹⁸ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 43.

¹⁹ Matta El-Meskeen, *Words For Our Time: The Spiritual Words of Matthew the Poor*, trans. James Helmy (Chesterton, IN: Ancient Faith, 2012), 8. “The idea of a young, prosperous, educated citizen of Alexandria abandoning everything to seek shelter in a monastery of that period was preposterous.”

God; and considering all his worldly goods, pursuits and desires, in the words of the Apostle Paul, rubbish.²⁰ “From the outset his goal was not monasticism but freedom in God, and he saw monasticism as the best means to attain his desired freedom.”²¹

B. St. Samuel’s Monastery

He began his monastic life in the poorest monastery in Egypt, Deir Anba Samuel (St. Samuel’s Monastery)²² in 1948 and took the name Matta El-Meskeen, or Matthew the Poor. The poverty of the monastery itself was a visible representation of the poverty Matta embraced with his monastic calling.²³ After selling all his possessions, he entered St. Samuel’s with a few books and the clothes on his back, keeping just enough money for the train fare to the monastery. This occurred during the warmest month of the year in August 15, 1948. When the weather changed Matta was without any winter clothes or blankets to keep him warm.²⁴ This led to physical sickness, great temptation and a time of severe spiritual testing. No medicine was available in the monastery to treat his sickness, and the food supply was meager. The monks lived off of stale bread and hard cheese and

²⁰ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 46.

²¹ Boctor, “Union with Christ,” 12.

²² Cornelis Hulsman, “Renewal in the Coptic Orthodox Church: Notes on the Ph.D. Thesis of Rev. Dr. Wolfram Reiss,” *Arab West Report*, November 22, 2002, accessed March 5, 2015, <http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2002/week-46/23-renewal-coptic-orthodox-church-notes-phd-thesis-revd-dr-wolfram-reiss>. Considered one of the non-traditional, or unrecognized, monasteries at the time. St Samuel was restarted in 1896 and “was influenced by monks who protested the monastic discipline or secularization of monastic life.”

²³ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 75. “Life at the monastery was extremely hard and meeting one’s basic needs was a fierce trial.” Only five elderly monks resided at St. Samuel’s when Matta arrived.

²⁴ To keep himself warm, Matta increased his prostrations in prayer during the night hours. Bowing, kneeling and standing in prayer, the Coptic ritual of prostrations was physically rigorous. These would include prostrations in worship, repentance and honor.

ate only once a day.²⁵ The sanitary conditions at the monastery were primitive and the monks' cells were in disrepair.²⁶ The sickness Matta endured during this time would weaken him physically and cause recurring health problems throughout his life.²⁷

Despite its deteriorating physical condition, the monastery was “free of conflicts”²⁸ and thus the ideal location for Matta.²⁹ As a college educated lay-person from the Sunday School movement his options were limited. The Sunday School was a reform movement and in the 1940s, despite its growth and official status, still faced increasing opposition from the institutional church. The monasteries were not open to these reformers.

Father Mina, the bishop and overseer of St. Samuel's Monastery, served and resided at a church in Old Cairo where Matta spent his first three months.³⁰ Preferring his parochial duties in Cairo, Father Mina never visited St. Samuel while Matta was there.³¹

²⁵ A broth of lentils was considered a good meal when lentils were available and during fasts they ate only pickled vegetables and beans.

²⁶ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 97. Snake bites and scorpion stings were a common occurrence in the monastery. Matta “killed no less than two hundred scorpions and ten snakes” while he was at St. Samuel's. He also requested antivenins from the Ministry of Health and was able to treat his fellow monks and visitors who were bitten or stung.

²⁷ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 70. “My body is weak because I have spent most of my days eating little and watching and praying intensely. My life has been eaten away by the wilderness.”

²⁸ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 51.

²⁹ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*. From the memoirs of Saad Aziz who accompanied Matta to the monastery, the two men believed “the Lord led us to go to the Monastery of Father Samuel, in the wilderness near Maghagha because it was a poor monastery and free of conflicts.”

³⁰ Bector, “Union with Christ,” 13. Father Mina was the official superior of St. Samuel but preferred his parochial activities in Cairo and spent very little time at the monastery. He never once visited the monastery during Matta's three years there as a novice monk. This left Matta without the direct guidance and help of his spiritual father.

³¹ Irénée Hausherr, *Spiritual Direction in the Early Christian East*, translated by Anthony P.

The last words of Father Mina to Matta when he departed for the monastery were the following: “My brother, send me a letter when you need anything.”³² Distant and inattentive leadership was not the monastic model for relationship, and it’s clear the lack of support and help from Father Mina had an effect on Matta. He learned to rely entirely on the Lord for all of his needs and was disciplined by the Word of God without any earthly teacher. Matta considered monastic life an “Abrahamic calling” because he did not know where he was going, how he would get there, and who would help him.

From the first day, I took refuge greatly in God. I exited the world not knowing where I was going, who will look after me and provide for me in the wilderness, physically, spiritually and in every other way, and no father to hear my confessions and guide me, but God became my shepherd. The monk who must first know where he will be a monk, and how to get there, is not a monk, because monasticism is an Abrahamic calling.³³

It was here in the Fayoum desert at St. Samuel’s Monastery that he compiled the notes that would later become his most famous work, *Orthodox Prayer Life*, first published in 1952. In the preface to his book, Matta shared a testimony of something significant that happened shortly before his solitary journey began in the desert. Before he set off for the monastery, a friend had given him a wrapped package that contained some of the writings of the Russian fathers and other eastern saints about prayer. These had been translated into English by Lazarus Moore from ancient manuscripts and

Gythiel (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1990), 7. The importance of a spiritual father in the life of a monk is foundational to monasticism going back to the time of St. Antony. Speaking of monks who fell away St. Antony says, “In their delusion they did not obey the commandment that states, Ask your father, let him teach you.”

³² *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 55.

³³ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 70.

included 122 pages of sayings.³⁴ Matta arrived at the monastery with nothing more in his possession than a Bible, a copy of St. Isaac the Syrian, a few notebooks and this wrapped package. Upon opening the gift he was overwhelmed and overjoyed by the provision of God and the treasure that had been placed in his hands. These sayings along with the Scriptures would be his guide³⁵ as he spent whole nights in prayer reciting the Psalms and the sayings of the Fathers. His understanding of prayer and the interior life grew as knowledge was gained through experience and practice.

God meant to besiege me with prayer. Whenever physical hunger turned cruel against me, I found my gratification in prayer. Whenever the bitter cold of winter was unkind to me, I found my warmth in prayer. Whenever people were harsh to me (and their harshness was severe indeed), I found my comfort in prayer. In short prayer became my food and my drink, my outfit and my armor whether by night or by day. This was all the more true in my case for I had no spiritual father or friend. I had neither a colleague nor a comrade for my journey. The voice of God was the only answer for all my needs.³⁶

Matta El-Meskeen practiced the ascetic disciplines of the desert fathers and spent his early monastic life in solitude and prayer. His initial goal was simply to give himself to God in prayer. Night vigils were a regular part of his discipline, and he would read the sayings of the fathers and ask God for clarification and understanding. He “would emerge every night with a new friendship with the spirits of these saints; with a knowledge and

³⁴ John H. Watson, “Abuna Matta Meskeen: Contemporary Desert Mystic,” *Coptic Church Review* 27, nos. 3–4 (2006): 71–73. Lazarus Moore, born in the UK and convert to Eastern Orthodoxy, had translated some of the works of the Russian fathers along with some sayings from other Eastern Orthodox mystics into English. This translation became the primary source of *Orthodox Prayer Life*. Both Lazarus Moore and Matta El-Meskeen shared similar feelings about the condition of the institutional church.

³⁵ Desert monasticism involves the supervision and oversight of a spiritual guide. Father Mina, Matta’s spiritual father, offered him no help or assistance while he was at Deir Anba Samuel.

³⁶ Matta El-Meskeen, *Orthodox Prayer Life* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s, 2003), 10.

illumination from them that grew every day.” Matta relates how the Lord had spoken to him in prayer that this knowledge was not for him alone but to be shared with others. Whenever possible and wherever available, Matta would collect more of the sayings of both eastern and western Fathers in order to provide a more complete understanding of the life of prayer. The result was a book written, not based upon intellectual knowledge, but on Matta’s experience and the experience of many others who had committed their lives throughout Church history to prayer.

If the reader examines my editing and commentary closely and compares it with the words of the fathers on the relevant topic, he will notice how my spirit has been molded by theirs. It might be difficult for him discern my language from their own. He will thus realize that the spirit of the fathers and their thought have been deeply impressed upon my own spirit and mind.³⁷

C. The Syrian Monastery

From 1948 to 1958 Matta would live out his monastic vocation at two different monasteries, Deir Anba Samuel and Deir El-Surian (The Syrian Monastery). Conflict with Father Mina³⁸ brought Matta to Deir El-Surian in 1951 where he was ordained a priest against his wishes. Here he was given permission by the overseer Bishop Theophilus to live in isolation outside the monastery where he dug a cave for himself in

³⁷ Meskeen, *Orthodox Prayer Life*, 10.

³⁸ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 142, 161. Father Mina wanted Matta to remain in Cairo as a parish priest and return from the Monastery of St. Samuel. Matta’s unwillingness to obey led to a cooling in their relationship. Anthony O’Mahony, “Tradition at the Heart of Renewal: The Coptic Orthodox Church and Monasticism in Modern Egypt,” *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 7, no. 3 (2007): 169. Matta’s biography mentions that the differences between Father Mina and Matta began in 1956 mostly as a result of metropolitan bishops who were against Matta and influenced Father Mina with false rumors against him.

the desert. A forty-minute walk from Deir El-Surian in distance, Matta would return to the monastery every couple of weeks to celebrate the Eucharist with his fellow monks. It was here in the desert of Wadi El-Natrun that Matta “found himself and the freedom he sought.”

He felt that he was beginning to understand deep truths about the nature of both the creation and of God, the Creator ... He began to understand also the meaning of God’s oneness, simplicity, omnipotence, omnipresence and self-existence, all those areas considered the difficult issues of theology. He had not gone to his cave in order to learn of creation. But in its absolute isolation, lowliness and simplicity, he felt he was lifted out of space and time to discover eternity. He felt he was experiencing a joy there alone in his cave such as he had never known before.³⁹

Matta’s desire to follow the desert fathers more fully led him to seek out the most famous hermit of the Egyptian desert in the twentieth century, an Ethiopian named Abuna Abdel Mesih El Habashi. Matta convinced the hermit to allow him to live and learn from him in the same cave. He also visited the Baramous Monastery and Father Mikhael Zerbawy to better understand the eremitic life.

He wasn’t long at Deir El-Surian before a group of disciples gathered around Matta and considered him their spiritual father. These disciples obtained permission from Bishop Theophilus to have Matta’s notes on the *Orthodox Prayer Life* published in 1952.⁴⁰ Matta divided his time between the solitude of his cell and the community of the monastery. He “continued to labor on behalf of the monks, providing guidance and taking

³⁹ Boctor, “Union with Christ,” 14.

⁴⁰ O’Mahony, “Tradition at the Heart of Renewal,” 169. Nazir Gayyed wrote the preface to the first edition in 1952. One year later he would be elected to the chair of theology at Helwan Seminary and in 1954 he became a monk at Deir El-Surian.

their confessions.⁴¹ He also reconnected with the *khuddam*⁴² of the Sunday School movement. These young students admired Matta's intellect and spirituality and were fascinated by his desert experience in solitude and silence.

Father Matta believed that he should not keep his experience with contemplative life in the desert to himself. He believed he had to give this experience back to the world through the students of the Sunday School movement ... he introduced the Church Fathers to the Sunday School movement⁴³

Keeping with the tradition of the desert fathers and their practice of physical labor, Matta also cared for the monastery's forty-acre garden. Physical labor would be a consistent practice throughout Matta's life.

Deir El-Surian became in the 1950s one of the few monasteries open to reform, and Bishop Theophilus welcomed the academic monks from the Sunday School movement. These included three of the most prominent reformers of the time, Nazir Gayyed, Saad Aziz and Matta El-Meskeen.⁴⁴ The influence of this monastery was significant despite the small number of monks present.⁴⁵

The reform at Deir El-Surian, which united common life, work and obedience gave rise to much interest at the time in Western monastic

⁴¹ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 115.

⁴² Active members of the Sunday School movement.

⁴³ Hulsman, "Renewal in the Coptic Orthodox Church."

⁴⁴ Samuel Tadros, *Motherland Lost: The Egyptian and Coptic Quest for Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2013), 157. Saad Aziz and Matta El-Meskeen were the first academic monks appointed under Pope Kyrillios to Deir Anba Samuel. Aziz, later to become Father Macari, was the most influential leader of the Sunday School movement in Giza while Nazir Gayyed, later to become Pope Shenuda, was from the Sunday School movement in Shubra. Both would consider Matta their spiritual father and all three would be nominated for the papacy in 1957. The conservatives, fearing the young reformers would takeover, changed the rules to disqualify the young candidates.

⁴⁵ Tadros, *Motherland Lost*, 157. Twelve resident monks were present in 1954.

circles. Intellectual work was at the heart of the changes. There was a printing press and library there, and it was open to the West and to patristic studies ... Father Macari (Saad Aziz) for the first time represented the Coptic Orthodox Church at the General Assembly of the World Council of Churches at Evanston.⁴⁶

The monastery boasted a large library and contained a printing press for the distribution of literature.

For a brief period in 1954, Matta served as Vicar of the Coptic Patriarch in Alexandria at the request of Pope Yousab II. Resistant at first, he finally submitted to this appointment and was warmly welcomed in Alexandria. Matta was much loved and respected by the laity for the depth of his sermons and was gifted at reconciling couples that had filed for divorce.⁴⁷ Concerning this time and Matta's appointment in Alexandria, "Sunday School Magazine reported that his greatest work was his personal influence, spiritual power, and labor to win souls for salvation."⁴⁸ The numerous reforms he implemented were welcome by many but caused opposition within the church hierarchy among the more conservative Coptic clergy and bishops. Efforts were made to discredit Matta and destroy his reputation, and he decided to leave Alexandria and return to Deir El-Surian in 1955.

When he found himself back in his place of peace and solitude, he said he was like a bird soaring in the heavens. He was tied up and bound for a time, but finally he was released to fly, to rejoice again in his monasticism,

⁴⁶ Tadros, *Motherland Lost*, 157.

⁴⁷ One of the Vicar's responsibilities was to legally certify divorce cases as the signatory. This he refused to do and instead asked to meet personally with each of the fifty-four couples. All but three of the couples were reconciled.

⁴⁸ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 128.

his stillness, to be always with God and to practice the monasticism for which he had left the world.⁴⁹

Matta was given the responsibility of Administrator at Deir El-Surian upon his return from Alexandria and the monastery flourished under his leadership.⁵⁰ More disciples gathered around him and his popularity grew both inside and outside the monastery. This increased popularity brought greater opposition against Matta from forces opposed to the reform. Matta fled Deir El-Surian in July 1956 and returned to Deir Anba Samuel. Knowing that many of the monks would want to follow him, he instructed his disciples to stay at Deir El-Surian. They chose instead to follow him to Deir Anba Samuel⁵¹ where they spent much of their time repairing the monastery and building new cells for the monks. They also continued their work translating the writings of the Church Fathers into Arabic for the benefit of the Sunday School leaders. These leaders along with Matta and his group of academic monks founded the House of Dedication in 1958.⁵² This house was an original community of seven monks and seven lay-people, whose life

⁴⁹ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 133.

⁵⁰ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 134. Father Theophilus had pleaded with Matta on numerous occasions to take on this role, “but he declined in order to avoid any form of leadership.

⁵¹ Bector, “Union with Christ,” 15. Submission to leadership is a critical component of monasticism and one of the vows that monks take is to obey their superiors. In this instance the monks’ disobedience to remain at Deir El-Surian was justified by their response to Matta’s request. “Monasticism is not a place but a fatherhood.” They considered Matta their spiritual father and insisted on following him to Deir Anba Samuel. One of those who followed Matta, Father Antonius, was later elected as Patriarch of the Coptic Church and became Pope Shenouda III.

⁵² *Beit El-Takris*, the House of Dedication, or Consecration, was the result of cooperation between the academic monks and the Sunday School movement. Matta became the spiritual father of this community and encouraged the students to live in celibacy, without possessions and study the Church fathers. Communal life was similar to that of the monks in the monastery except that vows were not made.

followed a strict rule—silence, fasting, prayer, study—and refused any external apostolate.”⁵³

D. Wadi El-Rayan

The opposition against Matta and his disciples increased after the election of Pope Kirilos VI in 1959.⁵⁴ Efforts were made to submit to church authority and honor the wishes of the new Patriarch who ordered Matta and his followers back to Deir El-Surian. Upon their return the situation quickly became unbearable and eventually the group left the monastery for the second time.⁵⁵ In 1960 Pope Kirillos VI issued the order for all monks to return to their monasteries.⁵⁶ Matta’s disciples faced a dilemma. They could obey the Patriarch and leave their spiritual father, being separated to their respective monasteries, or they could remain with Matta and go against the clear directive of Pope Kirilos VI. Eight chose to remain with Matta and followed him into the desert of Wadi Rayan, an isolated region south of Cairo, to live as the early desert fathers. These men had all entered monastic life from the Sunday School movement and had been greatly

⁵³ O’Mahony, “Tradition at the Heart of Renewal,” 170.

⁵⁴ Pope Kirilos VI was Father Mina, Matta’s spiritual father at St. Samuel.

⁵⁵ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 162. After making peace with Father Theophilus, the abbot of the monastery, Matta and his disciples returned with joy. The situation quickly changed however, with the administrator, Father Macarius, and some of the other monks. It began when Matta’s group, having received permission from Father Theophilus to remain in isolation, did not participate in the daily labors and Father Macarius protested. Father Macarius then turned against a member of Matta’s group, Brother Milad, and later another young recruit, Brother Wadia. The hostility felt towards Matta by Father Macarius was directed at his young disciples. Matta received permission from the Abbot to leave the monastery with his disciples and their furnishings. Shortly after their departure Father Macarius phoned Pope Kirilos and described the event as a mutiny causing great distress to the monastery.

⁵⁶ Bector, “Union with Christ,” 16. This order would have separated Matta and his disciples into different monasteries. “Because of their deep unity they chose rather to go to Wadi El-Rayan.”

influenced by Matta's example and his book, *The Orthodox Prayer Life*. Their decision endangered their relationship with the institutional Church and their retreat into the desert put their own lives at risk.

Matta assumed responsibility for his disciples and carried the weight of their physical and spiritual well-being in Wadi El-Rayan.⁵⁷ He led them to an isolated area without any arrangements being made for necessary provisions; food, water, materials or shelter.⁵⁸ His previous experience at St. Samuel's relying on God for his own well-being served him well with his disciples in this extreme location. It was here that Matta and his disciples were able to live out to the fullest extent what they had studied in the writings of the church fathers. “

Wadi El-Rayan became the place of silence, devoid of the noise and temptations of the cities and its inhabitants. The wilderness and the solitary place became for the Coptic *abbas* of the 20th century the exercising ground in which they could become the true athletes of God.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 208. As a spiritual father in the desert, Matta would provide teaching and training and would serve as confessor. “We were free to expose our sins and weaknesses and to work on correcting them ... every day the spiritual father gave us guidance through spiritual words that corrected and enlightened our path.” *Bio*, 208.

⁵⁸ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 189. Their location could only be reached by camel caravan, an eighteen-hour trip, and not without an experienced guide. “It was considered the abode of bandits and drug smugglers who took caravans to Libya.”

⁵⁹ Watson, “Abuna Matta Meskeen,” 77.

They practiced the eremitic lifestyle of the early Egyptian monks,⁶⁰ continuing their study and translating the writings of the Church Fathers.⁶¹ In this remote location they relied completely on God for their daily needs. The group experienced on numerous occasions God's miraculous provision and protection.⁶² "They considered their survival there for nearly a decade in a growing relationship to God a great miracle."⁶³

Matta neither encouraged nor discouraged his disciples from following him to Wadi El-Rayan, but their presence added a level of responsibility and pressure that Matta had yet to experience.⁶⁴ Their physical and spiritual well-being, safety, security and survival were his responsibility. His own health deteriorated and he had to return to Cairo

⁶⁰ Christiane Rathle, "The Desert Militants: Change and Modernizing Factors in Coptic Monasticism" (Master's thesis, American University of Cairo, 1987), 45. They shared one meal together during the week and celebrated the mass together. Their time was spent in solitude, prayer, and contemplation. Physical labor included carrying water from the well and tending the garden consisting of simple vegetables.

⁶¹ Rathle, "Desert Militants," 45. Translation work in Wadi El-Rayan included the works of St. Isaac and John Climacus. George Bebawi, "With the Desert Fathers of Egypt: Coptic Christianity Today," *Road to Emmaus* 10, no. 3 (Summer 2009): 3–37, accessed September 5, 2015, http://www.roadtoemmaus.net/back_issue_articles/RTE_38/With_the_Dessert_Fathers_of_Egypt.pdf, 18. Bebawi mentions how this was done according to Matta's instruction: "In the monastery when they copy the Fathers, they write by hand in the old way, because Matthew the Poor told them that to understand a text you must copy it, not just read it."

⁶² *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 194. Chapter 12 in Matta's biography relates the numerous dangers the monks faced from armed bedouins, wild animals, unclean water, and safely navigating the desert environment without getting lost. "Sometimes the flour ran out; we would say, 'May the Lord intervene,' and then we would find that He did because flour would arrive the same day, or the next at the latest."

⁶³ Bector, "Union with Christ," 18. The lack of clean water was a constant problem in Wadi El-Rayan and caused much difficulty and health problems. It was not until 1968 that they developed a drip system with the help of the National Research Institute and by using solar power were able to diminish the high levels of salt from the well water. *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 219.

⁶⁴ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 176. From the beginning and upon their arrival at Wadi El-Rayan, "our spiritual father was extremely concerned and anxious for our welfare." The Bedouins who led them to their location warned the, "No one is able to stay here long term the way you are living. With great difficulty we stay here two weeks out of the year to graze our camels."

on a number of occasions for medical treatment, but he never stopped caring for his disciples. Despite his physical weakness he joined the monks in their labor—building, clearing sand, carrying water and planting crops. During breaks he would discuss spiritual subjects and offer guidance. These discussions were recorded and later published.⁶⁵

The greatest hardship in Wadi El-Rayan, however, was not the isolation and extreme environment of the desert but the actions taken against Matta and his disciples by the Administrator at the Monastery of the Syrians.⁶⁶ An article was published in *Al-Ahram* newspaper⁶⁷ that brought public humiliation to the entire group and stated that Matta was officially banished by the Church and stripped of his ecclesiastical authority.

He looks back on the nearly ten years he lived at Wadi El-Rayan as the most difficult period of his life. The physical challenges of the monks' circumstances together with their meager diet and poor water supply affected their health during their entire time there ... The wadi could only be reached with the help of a knowledgeable guide, which meant they were almost entirely cut off from family and friends ... Egyptian drug traffickers threatened to kill them if they did not leave immediately on three separate occasions ... But far greater than any of these hardships was another they faced ... *Al-Ahram*, Egypt's main daily newspaper, carried an official announcement that the Church was defrocking Father Matta El-

⁶⁵ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 209. "Many of the most important written works of our spiritual father were produced in those difficult conditions, while he was building a wall or coating something with mud or cultivating."

⁶⁶ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 181. "The Bishop of the Monastery of the Syrians wrote a press release and paid for it to be placed in the Social section of the daily newspaper *Al-Ahram* on October 7, 1960 and in the newspaper *Misr* on October 12, 1960. It reported that Father Matta El-Meskeen and all of his sons; it listed them by name, had been stripped of all priestly rank and that the Church does not recognize them as monks."

⁶⁷ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 181. "The Bishop of the Monastery of the Syrians wrote a press release and paid for it to be placed in the Social section of the daily newspaper *Al-Ahram* on October 7, 1960 and in the newspaper *Misr* on October 12, 1960. It reported that Father Matta El-Meskeen and all of his sons; it listed them by name, had been stripped of all priestly rank and that the Church does not recognize them as monks."

Meskeen and his weak band of followers: they were no longer either priests or monks in the eyes of the church.⁶⁸

The unjust accusations against Matta and the actions taken by the Church went unchallenged for years as he refused to defend himself.⁶⁹ Following the teachings of Scripture to love and forgive, he received God's grace through much prayer and realized the spiritual nature of the trial he was enduring.⁷⁰ He committed his cause completely to Christ and provided a living example to his disciples of 1 Pet 2:23—"and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously." In a sermon to his disciples, Matta stated, "The one who obeys the command and endures the trial takes on the image of Christ."⁷¹ Matta credits his persecutors as making him the successful monk he became.

If you ask me, "Who taught you, trained you and made you a monk?" I will say, "Those who persecuted me are the ones who brought me into these riches." When I accepted the trial with contentment and thankfulness, God supported me.⁷²

⁶⁸ Boctor, "Union with Christ," 18.

⁶⁹ Boctor, "Union with Christ," 18. The actions taken against Matta were also taken against his followers, and he bore the weight of responsibility for their loss. "They were no longer counted priests or monks in the eyes of the church" because of their affiliation with Matta.

⁷⁰ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 171–72. Persecution and trials at the hands of his critics and the many false accusations made against him were constant but Matta understood these attacks as coming from Satan and battled accordingly by relying on the Word of God. "Day and night God's Word admonished me, and as Paul the Apostle said, 'When we are cursed we bless; when we are persecuted we endure it; when we are slandered we answer kindly.' Matta became highly skillful at living according to this verse."

⁷¹ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 183.

⁷² *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 183.

Through the trials God revealed to Matta what was in his heart and the hearts of his fellow monks; hatred, anger, resentment and enmity. They gained awareness of their own selves and their own lostness.

In this horrifying moment, spiritual awareness gained consciousness, we saw ourselves in the snare of death, and in a sorrow nearing despair we realized the skill of our hidden enemy, how he managed to secure the locks for so long ... when we denied self and marched over our fleshly senses and the lusts of the world, we were released.⁷³

Despite the hostility directed towards him, Matta made every attempt to submit to the Church.⁷⁴ In his mind, he never stopped serving the Church despite being defrocked unjustly.⁷⁵

Matta's personal feelings about the institutional Church may help to explain some of the opposition he faced from Church hierarchy.

It is essential to emphasize that the teaching of Matta El-Meskeen affirmed that "through the ongoing process of institutionalization the church was so accommodating itself to worldly society that it was losing the vision of Orthodox Christianity as defined by the Holy Scriptures and the Holy Fathers."⁷⁶

⁷³ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 185.

⁷⁴ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 168. "Those monks are being unjustly treated. They are right and yet they still submit." 215. When Pope Kilrilos VI sent a request to Matta for three of his monks to return to the Monastery of St. Samuel, he submitted and told his fellow monks, "We must demonstrate to the Church that we are her sons, and we submit to and obey her head in everything asked of us."

⁷⁵ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 169.

⁷⁶ Watson, "Abuna Matta Meskeen," 77.

He shared these feelings in common with Lazarus Moore, “who was famous for his brutal honesty concerning institutional religion and often referred to the ecclesiastical institutions as having ‘little generosity or heroism or real sanctity’.”⁷⁷

Restoration with the institutional Church came eventually through an apology from the Administrator at Deir El-Surian and later in a meeting with Pope Kirillos VI in 1969 seeking reconciliation and forgiveness.⁷⁸ The Patriarch requested Matta and his followers to leave Wadi El-Rayan and relocate to the ancient Monastery of St. Macarius in Wadi El-Natrun.⁷⁹

E. St. Macarius Monastery

St. Macarius Monastery (Deir Abu Maqar) is located ninety kilometers northwest of Cairo and dates back to the fourth century and the life of St. Macarius. Its location is in the ancient area of Scetis⁸⁰ where monks have resided in caves and communities since the

⁷⁷ Watson, “Abuna Matta Meskeen,” 72–73. “I must warn you that the outward form of the Orthodox Church is desperately wretched, in a word *crucified*, with little cooperation.” Early Pentecostals had the same aversion and dislike for institutional religion and denominational organizations.

⁷⁸ O’Mahony, “Tradition at the Heart of Renewal,” 171–72. “Patriarch Cyril VI, feeling himself to be aging, had Matta and his monks called and, in the presence of Anba Mikhail, Metropolitan of Asyut, asked for their forgiveness for the wrongs done to them in the past years.” Boctor, “Union with Christ,” 19. In Alexandria “he sought their forgiveness and they celebrated the Eucharist with him.”

⁷⁹ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 224. In the message Matta shared with his disciples while still in Wadi El-Rayan about the move to St. Macarius Monastery he mentioned divine guidance and the benefit to others. “There are many signs that it is God who has made things come together ... and from now on the pattern of our lives will change. Until now it has been for our benefit, but now it will be for the benefit of others, so that we can pass on to the next generation what we have received and gained in our struggle.”

⁸⁰ William Harmless, *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 174. Scetis was a vast wilderness; “ancient descriptions stress its stark isolation,” where travel was extremely dangerous and could only be done by “the signs and courses of the stars.” Here men are made perfect in holiness, but none but those of austere resolution and supreme constancy can endure such a terrible spot.”

second century.⁸¹ St. Macarius Monastery became the official residence of the Coptic Patriarch in the sixth century after their exile from the city of Alexandria by Byzantine rulers. Numerous attacks by Berber invaders beginning in the sixth century resulted in a number of deaths and destruction of buildings over the next five hundred years. The monastery's library housed a treasure of ancient manuscripts and books, much of which were plundered by Europeans in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The last two hundred years saw the monastery decline with buildings in decay, the land neglected and the number of monks greatly decreased.

The few monks who remained when Matta and his followers arrived in 1969 were poorly educated and physically weak. The monastery was in a terrible state of disrepair with only six aged monks and in desperate need of restoration and renewal both physically and spiritually. "We went to see the monastery and found it basically a pile of rubble and awash in sand drifts."⁸² Matta and his disciples left Wadi El-Rayan in 1969 and went to St. Macarius with the intent of continuing their eremitic lifestyle outside the walls of the monastery.⁸³ The desperate state of the monks and the living conditions caused Matta to reconsider and he challenged his followers to accept the responsibility of

⁸¹ "Desert Militants," 39. The area of Wadi El-Natrun includes three other monastic communities: St. Bishoy, The Syrian and Baramus.

⁸² *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 227.

⁸³ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 222. This was a part of the original agreement as outlined in the Biography, 221. "I requested one simple condition and said to him (Father Salib), 'I ask them to accept us as hermits around the monastery and also for the Pope to ordain us as *schema* monks according to the Church's original ritual'." Matta was very concerned about this tradition dying out and referred to it as the 'Great Schema'. Bishop Mikhael asked that this be delayed, "that their be no hermits to start with."

rebuilding.⁸⁴ Under Matta's leadership the ancient monastery began to expand and grow. The scale of their achievement was simply staggering.⁸⁵

Borrowing from the tradition of the desert fathers, Matta recognized the close relationship between physical work and prayer and emphasized the importance of both in the life of the monk.⁸⁶ He reminded his followers from the beginning "that the monastery walls ascend not by money but by prayer."⁸⁷ Successful work required fervency in spirit. "Beauty is when work and prayer are united as one."⁸⁸ Christiane Rathle did an extensive study on the growth and economic development of St. Macarius Monastery under Matta's leadership. The religious worldview and spiritual emphasis, much like the Protestant work ethic in America, provided the real impetus for growth according to her research.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 229. The physical labor in Wadi El-Rayan had been a source of great and constant difficulty and Matta had assured his followers that St. Macarius would be different. "You will no longer have to carry firewood, water or any other burdens ... instead each one will be able to stay in his cell to pray and leave behind that exhausting work."

⁸⁵ Watson, "Abuna Matta Meskeen," 71. Matta's community restored many of the old buildings, replacing some of them with more than one hundred and fifty new monastic cells. A refectory was rebuilt and a beautiful new library was constructed. A substantial number of spacious guesthouses were recreated for foreign guests. Several new buildings, which included a bakery, barns, garages and repair facilities, covered the site of the old monastery. A modern printing press was installed in 1978. The administrative, agricultural and institutional revolution at the Monastery of St. Macarius was very great. The spiritual revolution was much greater.

⁸⁶ Bector, "Union with Christ," 23. A novice at St. Macarius works three hours per day during his first year and learns the discipline of combining prayer and labor. Once this is done his work schedule becomes eight hours per day except on Sunday.

⁸⁷ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 231. "Don't believe for a moment that it is the stones and mortar that will make the buildings rise a hand span or two per day. They will rise only by prayer, and if you stop praying, even if you spend loads of money, the walls will not rise a single centimeter."

⁸⁸ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 246.

⁸⁹ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 245. The theology of restoration from the fall and the effects of the curse as understood in Eastern monasticism provides the basis for renewed efforts at physical labor and hard work. "Harsh work came into the world as punishment because before the fall Adam's work was not

The spirit behind this economic activity is characterized by great energy and initiative, on the part of the group, which makes work an end in itself and seeks to bring it under the control of rational judgement and precise calculation. Every minute is considered valuable and scientific advances are esteemed for their contribution to efficiency and rationality.⁹⁰

“Prayer without ceasing” (Luke 18:1) was the scriptural command that the desert monks tried to practice, and Matta learned this through his long hours of physical labor. By combining work with prayer and love, the success at the monastery was evident to all and productiveness greatly increased to God’s glory.⁹¹ Physical work had a secondary purpose in revealing the short-comings and sins within the heart. “This exposes pain lurking within him due to selfishness, pride, lack of longsuffering, anger, etc.”⁹² As these weaknesses are revealed through work, the monk is able to confess, repent and grow in his spiritual life. Physical labor was a way to mortify the flesh and learn patience, perseverance and dependence on God.

Modern technology and innovation were introduced to the ancient traditional monastic community and the combination triggered phenomenal growth and development. In planning the living quarters for the monks, Matta drew from his years of experience and provided cells that were spacious, bright and separate from the ongoing

exhausting ... When a man is reconciled to God, he becomes like Adam before the fall, with just a little effort he produces and creation obeys him.”

⁹⁰ Rathle, “Desert Militants,” 49.

⁹¹ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 248. The Minister of Agriculture once asked Matta what was the success rate of the seedlings and he responded 95 percent. The minister responded that was impossible because “it’s never more than 70 percent. After counting the seedlings himself he replied, “It must be your prayers.”

⁹² *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 249. “How enviable you are if your work is hard, because through it, little by little, yourself will be revealed as it really is with its stubbornness, lies, and pride, and you will continue to run it down until you get rid of it altogether.”

construction and activity at the monastery.⁹³ This activity and construction only increased as the monastery grew to include a spacious guest house, printing and medical center, and large dining hall.⁹⁴ The printing and publishing at St. Macarius became one of the best in the Middle East with the most up-to-date and modern equipment and provided both an income for the monastery and an outlet for Matta's many books and writings. A medical center run by the monks included an operating theatre and pharmacy and served the monastic community and workers with their medical, dental and pharmaceutical needs. The latest in agricultural innovation and technology was used to greatly expand the cultivated area around the monastery.⁹⁵

Upon a visit to St. Macarius in the late 1970s, President Anwar Sadat commented, "The state with all its capabilities could not have done what you have done for your monastery and your country."⁹⁶ The desert land now produces dates, figs, olives, melons and beet fodder. Imported Fresian cattle from Germany and a breeding station for sheep are a few of the experiments that have put St. Macarius on the cutting edge of meat and

⁹³ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 238. "Our spiritual father's comprehensive design for the monastery buildings came by inspiration from God and from his previous experience and sufferings ... the unhealthy conditions of the cells in which he lived affected his health and resulted in chronic illnesses that affected him for decades ... He said, 'I have thirty-six years of pain and trouble which I do not want my sons to experience as I did; I want them to have positive experiences'."

⁹⁴ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 241. The physical area increased dramatically from 4528 square meters to 32,000 square meters.

⁹⁵ Rathle, "Desert Militants," 55. When Anwar Sadat, the President of Egypt, flew over Wadi El-Natrun and saw St. Macarius from the air, he was so impressed with the monks agricultural achievements that he visited the monastery in the late 70s and donated 1000 acres of land to the monastery, along with a truck and bulldozer. The monks have cooperated with the government in training specialists and sharing research in crop development, breeding and desert reclamation.

⁹⁶ Shenouda Bishoy, "Father Matthew the Poor," *Coptic Church Review* 27, nos. 3-4 (Fall-Winter 2006): 98.

dairy production in Egypt. The monks operate three chicken houses containing sixteen thousand chickens each.⁹⁷ The high quality eggs are sold to five-star restaurants and super markets throughout the country. A large portion of the production is donated to prisons and the poor and helps to provide food for the monastery and the many visitors and guests. Beehives, fish farms, micro-mist irrigation systems and solar energy systems are some of the other ways the monastery is leading the way in desert reclamation, innovation and economic development.

Matta El-Meskeen worked tirelessly to establish the monastery, without taking into consideration the objections or fears regarding the community's financial means; from 1969, however, providence never failed. Occupied with the work of the monastery, the spiritual father was still available for his monks. During the night he gave himself over to prayer and to writing his works: "If I do not share with others what the Lord has given me, I have the distinct interior feeling that I am dishonestly keeping to myself what belongs by right to others".⁹⁸

Matta was one of three names put forward in the election of the new Patriarch in 1971 but requested that his name be withdrawn. Monasticism was his calling and he was committed and careful to avoid any ecclesiastical positions in the Church and wished to remain at St. Macarius.⁹⁹ A former disciple of Matta's and leader in the Sunday School movement in Shubra, Nazeer Ghayed, was chosen and became Pope Shenouda III in

⁹⁷ Hamza Hendawi, "St. Macarius Revives Egypt's Monastic Past," *Washington Post*, March 18, 2001. The monks supervise a poultry farm of 48,000 chickens and have a 700 –head cattle farm. The monastery employs 700 lay workers and commands 2000 acres of date palms and olive trees. Land reclaimed from the desert is planted with potatoes, wheat, banana trees and watermelon.

⁹⁸ O'Mahony, "Tradition at the Heart of Renewal," 167.

⁹⁹ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 254. Upon learning of his nomination Matta withdrew from the monastery to an undisclosed location to pray that his name would be removed from consideration. In a letter to the monks he writes, "I have told you this many times that my life's message is pure monasticism and that I will not in any way accept nomination to any ecclesiastical position. I remember my first covenant on my first day as a monk, when my feet first stepped onto the dust of the monastery, to be, remain and die a monk."

1971. The relationship between the two reformers became strained in the early eighties when President Anwar Sadat had the Pope placed under house arrest in the Monastery of Bishoy. Matta was critical of Pope Shenouda's outspoken opposition against the government and public protests on behalf of the Coptic Church and supported the actions of Sadat. Speaking of Shenouda's leadership Matta commented, "The mind replaced inspiration and planning replaced prayer ... For the first years I prayed for him but I see the Church is going from bad to worse because of his behavior. Sadat's actions protect the Church and the Copts."¹⁰⁰

In 1985 Pope Shenouda was released from house arrest and referred to Matta as "a rebellious monk."¹⁰¹ The pope refused to ordain any bishops from St. Macarius and the sale of Matta's books in Coptic Church bookstores was forbidden. Disagreements arose over various issues, some theological and some personal.¹⁰²

St. Macarius continued to grow under the leadership of Matta El-Meskeen and became the center of monastic reform and the "hub of agricultural and scholarly activity."¹⁰³ The number of monks grew from thirty in 1971, over eighty in 1981, and

¹⁰⁰ Cornelis Hulsman, "Reviving an Ancient Faith: Two Strong-Willed Reformers Bring Orthodoxy Back to Life," *Christianity Today*, December 3, 2001, 40.

¹⁰¹ Hulsman, "Reviving an Ancient Faith," 40.

¹⁰² Dr. Wolfram Reiss researched the Sunday School movement within the Coptic Church and highlighted the difference in emphasis between Shubra, where Pope Shenouda came from and Giza, where Matta had come from. Giza was much more open to ideas outside of the Coptic tradition and emphasized social outreach to the poor. "In St. Antonius, the service was linked to the personality of the leader and obedience to his spiritual authority. In Giza, however, followers were not tied to individual people but to the message of the church. This resulted in a focus on team spirit." Theological differences included Matta's understanding of *theosis*, or 'deification'.

¹⁰³ Hendawi, "St. Macarius Revives Egypt's Monastic Past."

over one hundred and twenty in the 1990s. The majority of monks at St. Macarius were university graduates and held degrees in a variety of fields including medicine, engineering, agriculture and pharmacology. Matta developed a spirituality based upon Scripture and “a rigorous study of the Church fathers.”¹⁰⁴ He encouraged his followers to learn the biblical languages, not for academic purposes alone, but to deepen their love and devotion to Christ and increase their faith and obedience. Solitude and prayer remained a fundamental practice for both Matta and his disciples. Much of his time at St. Macarius was spent outside the walls of the monastery in a nearby cave.

Despite his strong asceticism and anchorite experience, one cannot say that he turned himself away from the world and limited himself to his personal salvation only. Father Matta El-Meskeen continuously pointed to the responsibility of Christians in society and the church. In his publications it was clear he did not neglect the larger social problems of his time. Not withdrawal from the world, but complementary relation between withdrawal from the world and engagement with the world became characteristic of the reform of Father Matta El-Meskeen.¹⁰⁵

Matta El-Meskeen passed away on June 8, 2006, and was buried outside the walls of St. Macarius Monastery. The Fall/Winter issue of the *Coptic Church Review* paid tribute to Matta’s leadership and his impact on the Church. Among all of his great achievements and works, he is most remembered for the example he set in purity, simplicity and devotion to Christ. Through all the struggles, both internal and external, Matta remained true to his calling and inspired countless others. Through reviving the spirit of desert monasticism, Matta El-Meskeen is credited with bringing renewal and revival to the monastic communities scattered throughout Egypt and to the Coptic Church

¹⁰⁴ Hulsman, “Reviving an Ancient Faith,” 39.

¹⁰⁵ Hulsman, “Renewal in the Coptic Orthodox Church.”

as a whole. His influence continues to be felt through his numerous writings and recordings and his popularity throughout the Middle East continues to grow among Arab evangelicals, Protestants and Catholics. Many of his writings have been translated into over fifteen different languages. Mattá's appeal to those outside the Coptic Church can perhaps be attributed to his willingness to read and be influenced by the spirituality of Eastern and Western Church fathers, as well as contemporary Protestant and Catholic writers.

The main influences on Mattá's thought and spirituality are the Patristic Fathers, especially Athanasius and Cyril of Alexandria, and the monastic Fathers, especially Macarius the Great, Isaac of Nineveh and Ephram the Syrian. It is clear from Mattá's writings that he was also keen on hearing voices from Russian Orthodoxy, Protestantism and Catholicism.¹⁰⁶

Mattá's ecumenical spirit and wide sphere of influence was evidenced at the Ecumenical Conference on Spirituality held at the Bose Monastery in 2016 commemorating the tenth anniversary of his death. Speakers from a variety of Church backgrounds representing Christian clergy, scholars and denominational leaders and bishops presented Mattá's teachings on the monastic life and theology. Over two hundred and fifty participants representing numerous languages from around the world clearly demonstrated Mattá's growing popularity and continued influence.¹⁰⁷ Especially encouraging and perhaps the most surprising aspect of the conference was the majority of attendees were European millennials.

¹⁰⁶ Hani Hanna, "The Historicized Christology of Karl Barth and Mattá al-Miskīn: A Comparison for the Sake of Ecumenical Renewal" (PhD diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 2013), 3.

¹⁰⁷ Fouad Youssef, "The Concept of Freedom in God According to Father Matta El-Meskeen," *The Word of Life* 10, no. 4 (Fall 2016): 170–75.

II. The Literature of Matta El-Meskeen

The standard formula when a young disciple approached a spiritual father in the desert was “*Abba*, give me a word.”¹⁰⁸ These “words of salvation” were orally transmitted and eventually written down for future generations. Matta came to understand early in his monastic life that his calling and experience was to be shared with others, and this he accomplished through his writings. John Watson, writing in the *Coptic Church Review* after Matta’s death, highlighted the significance of Matta’s book on prayer, *The Orthodox Prayer Life*, saying, “This notable text ... must remain the central focus of his being and his ministry.”¹⁰⁹

It is perhaps not too much to say that his book on *Orthodox Prayer* has defined the prayer life of thousands of English language readers at the beginning of this century. It was a seed planted in the wasteland of the Wadi Rayan in the 50’s but in our own time it has become a forest—an *ecumenical* forest.¹¹⁰

The Orthodox Prayer Life was a product of Matta El-Meskeen’s early years in the desert in silence and solitude where he learned the discipline of prayer. His desire was not to write a book to benefit others but to give himself to prayer and offer his life completely to God. Having committed himself to prayer and the solitary life, Matta Meskeen had little to guide him and no one to assist him as spiritual father or friend on his journey.

In his cave near the Monastery of the Syrians, Matta writes, “I received in abundance and in summary, it is enough to say that every sentence I wrote

¹⁰⁸ Harmless, *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism*, 171.

¹⁰⁹ Watson, “Abuna Matta Meskeen,” 67–68.

¹¹⁰ Watson, “Abuna Matta Meskeen,” 71.

in the *Orthodox Prayer Life*, early in my monastic life, came from experiences in which I was caught up for days and even months.¹¹¹

It was this book, first published in 1952, that inspired a number of monks to follow him to Wadi Rayan in the early sixties. Dr. George Bebawi,¹¹² in an interview in *Road to Emmaus*, was asked how the new generation of Coptic Christians came to know about the Church Fathers:

The true beginning was the Arabic publication of an anthology under the title *The Orthodox Life of Prayer* ... When that book reached us in 1955—my generation—we were shaken by its depth and knowledge. It opened our eyes that there was a treasure called the “Fathers of the Church” about which we knew nothing.¹¹³

The treasure given to Matta in 1948 through the translation work of Lazarus Moore became in the 1950s a treasure to the Coptic Church and especially the Sunday School movement. Matta expanded the 120-page manuscript to include writings from other Church Fathers including John Climacus, Isaac the Syrian and John Chrysostom.¹¹⁴ In his introduction Matta writes:

I soon found that what was contained in the notes of the British pilgrim was not enough to cover the wide panorama of prayer. I thus began to collect other sayings of the Fathers, both of the East and West, from all the sources that reached my hand. I wished to present to the reader what should suffice for covering the whole course of a prayerful life.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen Biography*, 6.117.

¹¹² Bebawi, “With the Desert Fathers of Egypt,” 24. Dr. George Bebawi was one of a number of Coptic Christians encouraged to study Greek in the West in order to translate the Church Fathers into Arabic from their original source. He was the first to translate St. Cyril of Alexandria into Arabic from Greek.

¹¹³ Bebawi, “With the Desert Fathers of Egypt,” 23.

¹¹⁴ Bebawi, “With the Desert Fathers of Egypt,” 23.

¹¹⁵ Meskeen, *Orthodox Prayer Life*, 11.

The Orthodox Prayer Life is divided into three parts and contains sixteen chapters and two hundred and ninety pages. “The Nature of Prayer,” “Aspects of the Interior Activity of Prayer,” and “Impediments to Prayer” make up the three parts of the book. The book was first published in Arabic in 1952 and in English in 2003. The seventh and final edition in Arabic was published in 1995. The book can be found translated in several other languages as well. John Watson refers to it as an ecumenical text and mentions “many Christians from any tradition would experience the courage and the challenge of the content.”¹¹⁶

One example of Matta’s challenging content can be found in the second part of the book in the chapter on “Holy Silence.” The necessity for retreat and silence in the Christian life is highlighted and emphasized. In no other way can man know his true condition and discern whether or not his motives are pure or selfish. Matta asks the reader the question, “How much spiritual fruit have you borne as a branch in the vine?”¹¹⁷ This is a critical question for all believers but particularly those in spiritual leadership. Retreat and silence, when practiced correctly in an attitude of humiliation and contrition, reveal the naked-self before the eyes of God.

If you wish to know whether you are fruitful or not, enter your chamber, shut the door behind you, sit down in silence and prayer. Examine the depths of your soul. It is then that you will realize your nakedness and shame. You are not rich as you imagined before. You are poor, wretched and naked. Your soul, the branch of your life, is void of any spiritual fruit.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Watson, “Abuna Matta Meskeen,” 79.

¹¹⁷ Meskeen, *Orthodox Prayer Life*, 197.

¹¹⁸ Meskeen, *Orthodox Prayer Life*, 198.

The disciplines of retreat and silence are primary means of clearing the clouds of sin and producing contrition and humility. Matta explains how these disciplines should be practiced and compares the experience to “one getting ready to enter his grave.”¹¹⁹ Resurrection follows and the end result will be a life that is fruitful and truly pleasing to God. “When you become well trained in solitude you will find precious occasions for practicing the presence of God and unveiling your soul before its Creator so as to repair every defect and default in it.”¹²⁰

Silence and retreat along with other ascetic practices have often been abused or misunderstood when carried to the extreme. Throughout Church history examples abound of Christian monks and mystics misusing these disciplines and abusing their bodies in an attempt to earn salvation or merit forgiveness. In an article titled “Asceticism and Purity,” Matta highlights a number of significant theological points that should be understood concerning ascetic practices and their purpose. No amount of suffering or training in spiritual discipline can in any way merit the forgiveness of sin or earn any other reward. Reliance upon the grace of God rather than personal ability and effort will prevent the feeling of pride and the temptation to compare or compete with others. Asceticism should not be so severe as to harm the body or prevent the normal function of daily activities. It should be practiced under the supervision of a spiritual mentor and begin at a level that is easily attained. Severity in discipline increases slowly as the disciple progresses in grace

¹¹⁹ Meskeen, *Orthodox Prayer Life*, 199.

¹²⁰ Meskeen, *Orthodox Prayer Life*, 200.

and personal training. The end result is the mortification of the ego and the death of self-will.

Ascetic disciplines are nothing more than the means to mortify the old Adam and crucify our will, our passions, and the desires that work in us for iniquity. *Ascesis* is only a way of showing our love and tender feelings toward God ... If ascetic discipline is devoid of love and joy in the Lord, it turns into a source of depression, sullenness, and perturbation. It may also be a cause of pride and self-righteousness.¹²¹

In chapter sixteen of his book *The Communion of Love*, Matta writes about the Holy Spirit and the conflict between the kingdom of God and the enemy. “The Holy Spirit was one of the major themes around which Father Matta’s extensive writing and unique contemplation revolves.”¹²² This chapter provides a foundational and basic understanding of Matta’s theology and the desert fathers’ on asceticism and the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church and in the individual Christian. The tradition of the desert fathers and their way of life is best seen and understood through the persons and ministries of John the Baptist and the life of Christ. John was filled with the Holy Spirit while still in his mother’s womb, and Jesus was led into the wilderness immediately after the Holy Spirit descended upon him. Both were familiar with the desert environment and the ascetic disciplines practiced there. In imitation of these two, the desert fathers’ flight to the desert was not an attempt to escape the responsibilities and/or temptations of the world. “The intent of this escape into the wilderness was to engage the enemy, not to retreat from the enemy.”¹²³ The desert environment was considered the frontline of battle

¹²¹ Philip Turner, “John Cassian and the Desert Fathers: Sources for Christian Spirituality,” *Pro Ecclesia* 13, no. 4 (2004): 476.

¹²² Bishoy, “Father Matthew the Poor,” 93.

¹²³ Gerald L. Sittser, “The Battle Without and Within: The Psychology of Sin and Salvation in the

where creature comforts and worldly distractions were stripped away and the human heart was laid bare. “We are called inescapably to this confrontation with the enemy.”¹²⁴ According to Matta the Holy Spirit both instigates this war and “He too is the guarantor of victory and the effective power that can never be overcome.”¹²⁵ Illumination, or spiritual insight, is necessary to uncover the tricks and deceitful schemes of the devil, and this ability can only be acquired through the Holy Spirit and the Word of God.¹²⁶

During his time in Wadi El-Rayan from 1960–1969, Matta published no less than twenty-five books on various subjects.¹²⁷ He also wrote articles in each issue of *St. Mark’s Monthly* in Arabic, Greek and English. Concerning this periodical and Matta’s writing, the Abbot at St. Macarius, Bishop Shenouda Bishoy, wrote in the Coptic Church Review following Matta’s death in 2006:

It is one of the Church’s best periodicals, with widespread membership due to the depth of its subject matter and the richness of its substance. Father Matthew never used it as a podium to talk about himself or his achievements, nor to defend himself against accusations directed against him. His only objective was to provide readers with guidance to build their souls and benefit their lives.¹²⁸

Matta described his time in Wadi El-Rayan as the most difficult period in his life, and his writings during this ten year period came out of much suffering and pain.

Desert Fathers and Mothers,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 2, no. 1 (2009): 52.

¹²⁴ Matta El-Meskeen, *Communion of Love* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s, 2004), 186.

¹²⁵ Meskeen, *Communion of Love*, 189.

¹²⁶ Meskeen, *Communion of Love*, 194.

¹²⁷ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 208. Some of these include *Church and State*, *The Word of God*, *We Have Found Jesus*, *St. Antony the Biblical Ascetic* and *Thoughts on Family Planning*.

¹²⁸ Bishoy, “Father Matthew the Poor,” 97.

When I was persecuted, I would read (the Word), be filled with power and then respond by writing a beautiful book for the Church. Every book that came from my hands was written after brutal trials, attacks and wounds ... I lived under the declaration that left me banished, cut off and stripped of all status and I never opened my mouth. Instead throughout those years I wrote all these spiritual books you now see ... because the Word of God was to me a healer.¹²⁹

While at St. Macarius from 1969 until his death in 2006, Matta wrote more than eighty books and booklets, including fifteen volumes of biblical commentaries on the New Testament, the life of St. Paul the Apostle, and the life of St. Athanasius of Alexandria. Many of his booklets have been translated into English and published by St. Macarius Press. *The Orthodox Prayer Life* and *The Communion of Love* were published in English by St. Vladimir's Seminary Press in 2003 and 2004. The Orthodox Research Institute in 2008 published *The Titles of Christ* in English, and in 2013 a collection of Matta's informal talks were translated and published under the title *Words for Our Time*. The most recent publication in English came out in early 2016 from Ancient Faith Publishing titled *Words for Our Lives, Vol 2* and provides more of Matta's informal talks.

III. The Library of Matta El-Meskeen

Leaders are readers, and Matta grew his personal library over the years to over nine hundred books on theology, prayer Church history and numerous other subjects. He recounted his days in university when he would go to the library and check out ten to

¹²⁹ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 172. The source of these attacks and trials is mentioned on page 167, "Because of a number of ordained and lay leaders who poisoned the heart of the Pope, that period was very difficult for Father Matta and his sons the monks."

twenty books each month.¹³⁰ The Holy Bible was the most important book in his library. His love of the Bible grew during his university days and became the source of his happiness. “The reason I am a monk today is because of my passion for the Bible.”¹³¹ Monasticism was especially appealing to Matta because of his love for the Word and his desire to give all of his time to its study. “When I thought about the path of life that will enable me to give my life to the Bible, and the Bible to be for me and my life, I asked the Lord, Where shall I go?”¹³²

If you do not today draw your comfort, well being and happiness from their true heavenly source, that is Christ and the Bible, you will not find yourself ... It is impossible for the one who does not build himself on the Bible and Christ to feel stability and happiness.¹³³

His meager possessions in 1948 upon entering the monastery included a Bible, the writings of St. Isaac the Syrian, and the transcript from Lazarus Moore. In the late 1950s Father Matta had received a complete English publication of the Fathers.”¹³⁴ He vowed to the Lord early on that he would read only those writings and books that the Lord would give him.

Matta demonstrated an unusual openness to the writings of Christians and theologians outside the Coptic Church. In this respect, Matta goes against the prevailing attitude within the Coptic Church which tends to stay “protected” within the walls of its

¹³⁰ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 23.

¹³¹ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 34.

¹³² *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*.

¹³³ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 24.

¹³⁴ Hulsman, “Renewal in the Coptic Orthodox Church.”

own orthodoxy. Protestant and Catholic perspectives on theology and spirituality are not often considered or endorsed by Coptic clergy. His personal library included the works of Spurgeon, Boenhoffer, Bruce, Morris, Lightfoot, Westcott, Barrett, Bultmann, Kuyper, Guthrie, Ryle, Lloyd-Jones, Pink, Tenney, Edersheim, McDowell, Kaiser and Swindoll. Now a part of the general library at the Monastery of St. Macarius, Matta's collection includes books in French, English, Arabic, Hebrew, Greek and German. A complete list is provided in Appendix A.

IV. Summary

Matta El-Meskeen answered the call of God, sold everything he owned and found the desire of his heart in a monastic vocation that lasted fifty-eight years. As one of the first educated students from the Sunday School movement to enter the monastery, he was often misunderstood and persecuted by the church hierarchy. Loving Christ and giving everything to God was his solitary goal in monasticism and through the difficulties, both from without and within, he emerged from the desert with an attraction much like St. Antony. He was admired by many in the Sunday School movement and many joined him in monastic life after reading his first publication *The Orthodox Prayer Life*. Matta and his followers submitted to the request by Pope Kirilos VI and relocated to St. Macarius Monastery in Wadi El-Natrun in 1969. Over the next twenty-seven years under Matta's leadership, St. Macarius grew to over one hundred monks and became a center of spirituality for the Coptic Church. It also led the way in agricultural innovation, technology and desert reclamation for the country of Egypt. Matta's own disciple, Nazzir Ghayyed would become Pope Shenouda in 1971, a position Matta was selected for but avoided in order to remain true to his monastic calling. Much of his time at St. Macarius

was spent outside the monastery walls in his desert cave in solitary communion with God. Since his death in 2006, Matta's influence through his life and writings continues to impact the Coptic, Catholic and Protestant Churches worldwide.¹³⁵

Father Matta lived a monastic, ascetic and virtuous life for the greater part of the eighty-seven years he spent on earth. I make this testimony for the record and because it is truth: Father Matta El-Meskeen was a bright milestone for the Copts. He represented a new era in Coptic theological writing. During his long monastic life he continued to fight and struggle as an honourable spiritual knight. He never lost sight of his target but always took a precise aim at it. He is now carried into heaven.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ Watson, "Abuna Matta Meskeen," 91. "In many of the Western Churches—Catholic and Protestant—Abouna Matta El Meskeen is regarded as the greatest Coptic Orthodox spiritual father of the last century."

¹³⁶ Watson, "Abuna Matta Meskeen," 92. Written by Metropolitan Mikhail of Asyut in the Coptic Christian newspaper *Watani*.

CHAPTER 6: A MODEL OF AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP

I have found the one my heart loves. I held him and would not let him go.
—Song of Solomon 3:4

The secret of a great life is often man's success in deciphering the
mysterious symbols vouchsafed to him, understanding them and so
learning to walk in the true path.¹
—Alexander Solzhenitsyn

How does the life of Matta El-Meskeen, a Coptic monk in the desert of Egypt, relate to the contemporary Pentecostal church and in what ways does he provide an example for authentic Pentecostal leadership. This chapter provides an analysis of the material presented thus far, looking specifically at Matta's life and monasticism from the previous chapter to answer these questions. The analysis will include both the descriptive and interpretive aspects of Osmer's model of practical theology. Authentic leadership and the major components of this theory presented in chapter two will provide the primary lens for interpretation and analysis. The historical context presented in chapter four highlights the significant departure of the Coptic Church from true-north principals and provides an example of the natural drift that occurs over time in any organization. Quinn describes this as the fundamental dilemma facing every organization; deep change or slow death. The response to the crises was a lay-led reform movement, the Sunday School movement, which sought to return the Coptic Church to her former glory.

¹ Os Guinness, *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 64.

Following the analysis of Matta as a model for authentic leadership, chapter seven will then highlight how his example relates to authentic Pentecostal leadership and what elements of his life and ministry would be beneficial for Pentecostal pastors and leaders.

At the turn of the century in the early 1900s, significant religious movements were underway across continents and efforts were being made to rediscover the “ancient paths” both in the eastern and western Church. Restoring the glory of Pentecost and the gifts of the Spirit evident in the early church with an emphasis on the baptism of the Holy Spirit and miraculous signs was a growing and earnest desire among groups of Protestants in North America, England, Wales, Australia and as far east as India. The Assemblies of God and other Pentecostal denominations were formed out of this restoration movement in the early 1900s. At the same time in Egypt a movement within the ancient Coptic Church was responding to an increase desire and need to rediscover its roots and withstand the growing pressures that threatened its very existence. Habib Guirgis began gathering and instructing Coptic youth in churches throughout Cairo in what became known as the “Sunday School Movement.” In America people were gathering in ever-growing numbers to places like Azusa Street in Los Angeles, California to witness and experience Pentecostal revival and hear preachers like William Seymour. The Sunday School Movement in the Coptic Church was officially recognized around the same time as the formation of the Assemblies of God. Both movements would experience considerable growth over the next decades and produce leadership that would multiply and increase these early efforts exponentially.² The effectiveness and success of these

² The Assemblies of God was formed in 1914 in Hot Springs, AR. By 1944 there were over five thousand churches in the US, with a total membership exceeding 225,000.

leaders would be directly tied to their authenticity in discovering and maintaining the core values and guiding principles of their respective movements. Matta El-Meskeen represents one of these leaders in the Coptic Orthodox Church.

I. Critical Life Events

Leadership was not on the mind of Matta El-Meskeen when he sold everything he owned, left his friends and family and entered the monastery of St. Samuel in 1949 at the age of thirty. The result of that decision and the life that followed, however, would set Matta apart as one of the great Church leaders of the twentieth century. His decision was not without great turmoil and struggle. The opposition he faced as a young man in becoming a monk from family, friends, colleagues and clergy was intense. “He views this as the most critical period in his life.”³ In the end he appealed to St. Antony and St. Pachomius, men who were highly esteemed in the Coptic Church, and declared he was only following their example.

You yourselves uphold the example of Father Antonius and Father Pachomius and the other saints. Were they wrong? Is not the Church built upon those saints? So if they were wrong then I will concede I am wrong. If the Lord led them astray then let Him lead me astray because I have given myself to the Lord.⁴

Though extreme to others, Matta viewed his calling and the direction he was taking as being authentically Coptic and in keeping with the history and tradition of the Church in Egypt. His introduction to the Church Fathers through his involvement in the Sunday

³ Farouk T. K. Bector, “Union with Christ in the Work of Matta El-Meskeen” (ThM thesis, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1995), 11.

⁴ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen: A Biography* (St. Macarius Publishing, 2008), 49.

School movement while studying at Cairo University in Giza provided models to follow. His university days in general and his experience at a small group meeting in particular were critical life events to his future calling. He was increasingly being led to follow the path of the desert monks.

Matta's interest in the Church Fathers, his study of the patristic writings and early monastic communities in Egypt was not merely academic but spiritual. Through his study of their lives he hoped to better understand prayer in all of its facets. He also hoped for a monastic reformation⁵ that would "restore the glory of the first Church."⁶ Matta's first experience at monastic life at St. Samuel's Monastery would last three years and would lay the foundation for his future leadership and prepare him for the challenges ahead. This was a crucible experience that bore the fruit of his most influential work, *The Orthodox Prayer Life*. Much like St. Antony who gradually retreated further into isolation and solitude, this first step of withdrawal and retreat would lead him ever deeper into the desert of Wadi El-Rayan twenty years later. The ten years spent in Wadi El-Rayan would be the most difficult period of his life (chapter 5, note 35).

Critical life events are described as "trigger events" or "high impact moral dilemmas" that play a significant role in leadership formation and development. Upon

⁵ Monasteries in Egypt had degenerated to the point where many of the monks were illiterate and those who were educated were only there out of ambition to seek higher office in the Coptic Church. Reiss mentions Matta's unwillingness to enter a traditional monastery because of the spiritual climate and institutionalization.

⁶ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 52. Both Matta El-Meskeen and Saad Aziz, later to become Father Samuel, decided they would go to St Samuel Monastery and went first to Father Mena the Hermit at Mar Mena Church in Old Cairo. A meeting took place between these three men and Father Boulis Boulis and the hope was expressed that "Father Mena would be father to a monasticism that restores the glory of the first Church; a monasticism removed from positions of importance and money."

reflection and with discernment, these events can help an individual better understand what their core values are and how they have been shaped. Focus on these significant life events helps to capture and define one's life-story.⁷ "Trigger events may be viewed as critical incidents in a given leader's life that result in deep introspection and a change in his or her implicit theories about the linkage between leadership and morality."⁸ Self-awareness and self-concept are formed through these events.⁹ Four trigger events, or critical life events, will be analyzed in the life of Matta El Meskeen.

1. University/Sunday School Movement (1940–1944)
2. Calling and Personal Struggle (1944–1948)
3. St. Samuel's Monastery (1948–1951)
4. Wadi El-Rayan (1960–1969)

These time periods can be described as his introduction/exposure to ancient monasticism through the Sunday School movement, his calling to monasticism, his experience with cenobitic monasticism and his experience with eremitic monasticism.

⁷ Bruce Avolio and William Gardner, "Authentic Leadership Development: Getting to the Root of Positive Forms of Leadership," *Leadership Quarterly* 16, no. 3 (June 2005): 318. Shamir and Eilam (2005) "describe how leaders' life stories provide insight into the meanings they attach to life events to guide followers, and in turn to develop themselves over time through reflection."

⁸ William L. Gardner, Bruce J. Avolio, and Fred O. Walumbwa, eds., *Authentic Leadership Theory and Practice: Origins, Effects and Development*, Monographs in Leadership and Management 3 (Bingley: Emerald Group, 2005), 45.

⁹ William L. Gardner, Bruce J. Avolio, Fred Luthans, Douglas R. May, and Fred Walumbra, "Can You See the Real Me? A Self-Based Model of Authentic Leader and Follower Development," *Leadership Quarterly* 16, no. 3 (June 2005): 349. Proposition 1: Critical elements from the personal histories of authentic leaders, including influential persons who model authenticity and pivotal trigger events, serve as positive forces in developing leader self-awareness.

A. University/Sunday School Movement

College is a critical time for any young person and identity is a major issue as the structure of home and family is replaced with new freedom, friends and ideas on the university campus. The many historical factors mentioned in chapter 4 concerning Coptic identity made this an especially critical period in Matta's life. The Sunday School was a positive influence on his life and helped shape his identity at a critical time. One particular youth meeting had a negative effect, however, and would be considered a significant "trigger event." The negative comment made by one of the youth leaders concerning Protestants Matta strongly disagreed with and voiced his opinion.¹⁰ The words he used later to describe this event—shock, shattering moment of revelation, religious, national and ethnic disaster¹¹—demonstrate the degree to which it affected Matta and his view of leadership. Deep reflection upon this event specifically and leadership in general developed in Matta a core value and strong desire for authenticity in leadership. Authentic leadership is characterized by transparency and trust between the leader and follower and emphasizes follower development and guidance toward worthy objectives. What he continually witnessed among leaders, whether academic, political or religious, while on the college campus was inauthenticity characterized by manipulation and compulsion. He possessed the discernment to see many of these leaders for what they were; "wolves dressed in sheep's clothing." They were robbing, enslaving and preying on the youth. The Sunday School Movement was not characterized by such inauthentic

¹⁰ Chapter 5, 2.

¹¹ Boctor, "Union with Christ," 5.

leadership, but this particular incident was a critical event that deeply influenced Matta. For the most part the movement was positive and provided Matta with examples of authentic leadership in the lay leaders of the movement¹² and in the lives and stories of the Church fathers. Exposure to these heroes and martyrs in Egyptian Christian history stirred Matta's heart and awakened a desire to experience the same depth of spirituality. Their example would lead him to become the leader he longed for—one "who was both transparently honest and truly free."

B. Calling and Personal Struggle

The desire awakened in his university days continued to grow after graduation and his success as a pharmacist only intensified the internal personal struggle. "I loved Christ and I wanted to leave everything and follow him."¹³ The expectations and influence of family, friends, customers and neighbors seemed to be the source of his greatest struggle.¹⁴ The pull he felt was toward Christ and not toward monasticism. Matta

¹² Matta specifically mentions Wahib Zaky Surial, who later became Father Salib Surial, as a passionate preacher/teacher in the Sunday School.

¹³ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 33.

¹⁴ Margaret Hopkins and Deborah O'Neil, "Authentic Leadership: Application to Women Leaders," *Frontiers in Psychology* 6, no. 959 (July 2015): 1–5, accessed April 6, 2017, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4502531/pdf/fpsyg-06-00959.pdf>. Maslow (1971) discussed the authentic or true self as one who is not hindered by others expectations of them; and Kernis (2003) proposed that the true self is not developed through conforming to social norms and pressures (3). The humanistic psychological perspective considered the development of fully functioning or self-actualized individuals who see themselves clearly and accurately and are not hindered by others expectations for them (2).

emphasized his desire was not to become a monk but to give himself completely to Christ.¹⁵ Monasticism was simply the best way he knew to accomplish this desire.

Our primary calling as followers of Christ is by him to him and for him. First and foremost we are called to Someone (God), not to something (such as motherhood, politics or teaching) or to somewhere (such as the inner-city or Outer Mongolia) ... The one aim of the call of God is the satisfaction of God, not a call to do something for Him.¹⁶

Jim Wallis, the founder of Sojourners, distinguishes between career and vocation, the latter representing a person's calling, their "True North." "Career is putting your skills and assets on a resume, and trying to climb the ladder of success. Vocation is discerning your gifts and calling. Your vocation is your True North, what you're called to do."¹⁷

These two quotes seem to be contradictory but in fact are complimentary and in keeping with the Scriptures. Jesus said, "You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit" (John 15:16, NASB). The calling is first to relationship and then to action; being with Christ before doing for Christ.¹⁸ The Gospel of Mark highlights this distinction when Jesus chose the disciples: And He appointed twelve, so that they would (1) be with Him and that He *could* (2) send them out to preach (Mark 3:14). "To have a vocation is to be called to a life of ongoing participation in the

¹⁵ This included a consecration to celibacy when he was in college.

¹⁶ Guinness, *The Call*, 41; Oswald Chambers, *The Moral Foundations of Life: A Series of Talks on the Ethical Principles of the Christian Life* (1936; repr. Hants: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 2015), 53.

¹⁷ Bill George, *Discover Your True North: Becoming an Authentic Leader* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2015, Kindle, 3956).

¹⁸ Roberts Liardon, *God's Generals: Why They Succeeded and Why Some Failed* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker, 1996), 169. John G. Lake, one of the early Pentecostal pioneers often said "that the secret of heaven's power was not in the doing, but in the being."

redemptive work of the Son and the Holy Spirit.”¹⁹ Both Jim Wallis and J. Michael Stebbins emphasize the importance of discernment, or understanding, in the pursuit of vocational calling. Attentiveness and alertness followed by appropriate response to divine promptings are a continuous and necessary process in finding the “sure path” and remaining faithful to one’s “true north.”

At the time of Matta’s calling, monasticism in Egypt was in decline and most of the monks were illiterate and came from among the poor and uneducated. Matta was the first college graduate of his generation, a pioneer of sorts, to enter the monastery.²⁰ The opposition he faced from family and friends becomes a little more understandable in light of this fact—no one else from his social or economic status was considering such a vocation.²¹ This was completely new territory for someone in Matta’s position; a college educated lay-person from the Sunday School movement wanting to enter the monastery.

C. St. Samuel’s Monastery

The decision to follow the call of God to monasticism led to complete impoverishment as he abandoned his old life and took the new name, Matta El-Meskeen (Matthew the Poor). Up until this point Matta (Yousef Iskander) had lived a relatively comfortable existence in Cairo and Demanhour, Egypt. The three primary factors making

¹⁹ J. Michael Stebbins, “Leadership, Discernment and the Elusiveness of Understanding,” accessed September 15, 2017, <https://www.stthomas.edu/media/catholicstudies/center/documents/businessasacallingpdf/13Stebbins.pdf>, 1.

²⁰ Matta El-Meskeen, *Words For Our Time: The Spiritual Words of Matthew the Poor*, trans. James Helmy (Chesterton, IN: Ancient Faith, 2012), 8. “The idea of a young, prosperous, educated citizen of Alexandria abandoning everything to seek shelter in a monastery of that period was preposterous.”

²¹ Saad Aziz would be the only exception as he joined Matta at St. Samuel’s.

the time at St. Samuel's a critical event in Matta's life include the following: (1) The physical condition of the monastery, (2) the lack of spiritual oversight and help, and (3) the need to rely entirely on the Lord.

Matta's new identity left him utterly dependent and alone. A fool for Christ in the eyes of many,²² he embraced his new life and completely renounced the old. As it was said of Francis of Assisi, "he had won the greatest victory a man can win—the victory over oneself."²³ Os Guinness, writing about calling and Christian discipleship, mentions St. Francis as one who "had been turned upside down and become God's jester, God's juggler, God's fool."²⁴ Much like St. Francis, Matta would attract many followers and disciples through his act of faith and obedience by practicing what the church traditionally called white martyrdom.²⁵

D. Wadi El-Rayan

Matta described the ten years in Wadi El-Rayan as the most difficult period in his life. His heart's desire and calling to embrace the eremitic life of the desert fathers and walk their path into the isolated regions of the wilderness became a reality. The physical

²² Matta El-Meskeen, *Words for Our Lives: The Spiritual Words of Matthew the Poor*, trans. James Helmy (Chesterton, IN: Ancient Faith, 2016), 17. "When I first decided to enter monasticism, there was not a human being who met me without telling me that I was out of my mind. Monks, bishops, priests, friends, family—they all said I was crazy. It was because monasticism was a dead enterprise. No one was going that way."

²³ Guinness, *The Call*, 219.

²⁴ Guinness, *The Call*, 219.

²⁵ Guinness, *The Call*, 223. One of three types of martyrdom—red martyrdom by blood; green martyrdom, by the exercise of the spiritual disciplines of abstinence; and white martyrdom, by abandoning everything for the love of God.

dangers were many, the living conditions more difficult than St. Samuel's and the isolation was extreme. The two factors beyond these that made this a crucible experience were (1) his responsibility for the well-being of those who followed him, and (2) the actions of the church to defrock him and his fellow monks.

Deep change would occur in each of these men as a result of their time in Wadi El-Rayan and this would increase their moral power to eventually bring change to others and to the institution itself. Their loyalty to Matta also highlights the relational aspect of authentic leadership between follower and leader. "What is necessary and highlighted by Jones and Grint is the interaction between leaders and followers; that authenticity is an action that must be "practiced" in the context of relationship and cannot be known simply by the individualized self."²⁶ This comment was made in reference to the Allegory of the Cave and what Jones and Grint considered the "elitist nature" of Plato's Cave. Interestingly these men in Wadi El-Rayan, each with their own individual and literal cave, experienced a greater unity and love for each other through this shared experience. "I want us to live by the spirit with which we lived in Rayan, where the conditions were as difficult as they could possibly be; it was our love for each other and our unity that preserved the group for ten years, and the trial turned to glory."²⁷

Transparency, trust and credibility describe the relationship these monks had with their spiritual father. Matta's life was an example of humility and service and he was not afraid to share his own weakness and struggles. One of the primary responsibilities of a

²⁶ Chapter 2, 14.

²⁷ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 176. A quote from Matta El-Meskeen spoken to a group of monks who travelled to serve in Africa in 1977.

spiritual father was to hear confession and offer guidance, something that was not afforded to Matta when he was at St. Samuel's. His disciples recognized that he had their best interests at heart and his concern and care was genuine. The result was spiritual growth.

Our father wanted to give us the true stillness of the desert so that the spirit would truly be spared of any hindrance. We were free to expose our sins and weaknesses and to work on correcting them, after which we grew spiritually and experienced God's care. Every day the spiritual father gave us guidance through spiritual words that corrected and enlightened our path.²⁸

The incident creating the greatest hardship, the article in Al-Ahram leading to public humiliation, highlights why discernment was so important to the desert fathers and why it is an indispensable gift in leadership today. The observation by Alvesson and Sveningsson, that "it is nearly impossible to investigate authenticity,"²⁹ is accurate but doesn't take into account the spiritual nature of discernment and the ability that God gives to reveal what is true and authentic. A response to enemies and false accusers that defends and justifies oneself may be natural but is not authentic for the Christian leader. It took discernment and awareness for Matta to realize this was a test from the Lord and the response needed to be in keeping with the biblical command to love your enemies.

I accepted and bore this ordeal, was content with I, and quickly was able to thank God for it. As soon as there was a spirit of thanksgiving, a joy entered my heart that I am unable to express. A thousand prostrations are not enough to give a taste of this joy born out of thankfulness for the trial. No fasting, or any deed of love, or any sacrifice caused me to taste anything like this joy that until today motivates, strengthens and gives me discernment. This is the power of joy and thankfulness in any trial.³⁰

²⁸ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 208.

²⁹ Chap 2, note 47.

³⁰ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 183.

Alvesson and Sveningsson in their critique of authentic leadership also highlight the religious undertones of this construct and express the opinion that only an extraordinary person like Jesus or Buddha could be considered an authentic leader. Matta's simplicity and humility demonstrate quite the opposite; authenticity is not simply ideological but practical and attainable for the ordinary and everyday person, given that person is in relationship to Christ.

II. Self-Awareness

Bruce Avolio's emphasis on leadership development has focused on theories and models to accelerate the qualities necessary for authentic leadership, and yet he admits there is no proven theory on self-awareness. He and Gardner indicated that to know one's self is perhaps the most critical first step for any leader. "At the base of authentic leadership are two questions; who is the leader, and is the leader being true to him/herself?"³¹ Though its importance is acknowledged and enhancing the leader's self-awareness is the goal of training and education, the construct is without a proven theory. "Know thyself," inscribed on the Temple at Delphi by the ancient Greeks, remains somewhat elusive. The early monks fully agreed with the importance and priority of self-knowledge and considered the desert environment the ideal location. In this extreme environment the self is fully exposed. "You can pray anywhere ... but in the desert, in the

³¹ Gardner, Avolio, and Walumbra, *Authentic Leadership Theory and Practice*, 143.

pure clean atmosphere, in the silence—there you can find yourself. And unless you begin to know yourself, how can you ever begin to search for God?”³²

The desert offers an environment that cannot be controlled or managed and represents the barrenness of the inner landscape of the soul. “What the desert teaches is a radical letting-go of the thinking-experiencing-managing self, so as to be content with God alone.”³³ Belden Lane called it a laboratory for dealing with self and the compulsions of needing others for self-worth. The spirituality of the desert presents a model of separation, solitude and silence in community with other monks under the leadership of a spiritual father (*abba*) offering direction and advice. Confession of weaknesses, thought patterns and personal struggles were shared honestly and advice was given in the form of short stories, biblical admonitions, and simple statements. One statement by Abba Moses, “Go sit in your cell and your cell will teach you everything,” sums up the desert priority to the confined space within the desert environment where spiritual formation occurs and the self is confronted with its own emptiness and sin. Antony compared a monk outside of his cell to a fish out of water. The monastic cell at St. Samuel’s was the beginning of Matta’s journey to finding his heart’s desire. Throughout his life the geographic locations would change, but the monastic cell remained a constant and central feature of his life and ministry. It was in his cell that Matta grew and experienced in ever-increasing ways God’s great love, true freedom from the world, and a greater self-awareness of his strengths and weaknesses.

³² William Dalrymple, *From the Holy Mountain: A Journey Among the Christians of the Middle East* (London: Harper Collins, 1997), 410.

³³ Belden Lane, *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes: Exploring Desert and Mountain Spirituality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 238.

Entrance to the monastic orders involves a drastic reorientation in terms of identity. Both the clothing and the naming of the monk emphasize this change. Yusef Iskander died in 1948 when he entered the monastery. The black clothing worn by the monks represents this death to the world and to the former life. A new identity, a new name and a new family replace the old. Often for a period of time, novice monks will not even acknowledge family members.³⁴ Matta El-Meskeen began his new life completely unencumbered and cut off from the past. The motivation for monasticism and the fundamental desire of Matta's heart was to love Christ,³⁵ and prayer was the means to fulfilling that desire. His first year and a half at St. Samuel was spent in isolation,³⁶ practicing what he would later write are the fundamental disciplines for spiritual leadership: silence, retreat and long prayers. These disciplines would remain a constant throughout Matta's life and keep him centered and true to his vocational calling. Reggie McNeal in his book *Practicing Greatness* includes seven disciplines necessary for great leadership with self-awareness being the first and solitude being the last.³⁷ It was in

³⁴ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 53. Matta's sister came to visit him shortly after he sold his pharmacy in Damanhour and took his vows in Old Cairo, and he denied that he had a sister. Father Mena refused her entry because Matta denied he had a sister. "She wept and assured him he is her brother. When Father Mena went back in and rebuked him for denying she is his sister, he said, 'I died to the world, and the dead man has no relations with those still living'."

³⁵ Matta acknowledged in his biography that he knew very little about monasticism before he became a monk and had never visited a monastery.

³⁶ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 79. Matta explains it was not out of emotional imbalance or a dislike for people or anti-social feelings that he embraced solitude and isolation. "I enjoy people, but I did not want to allow anything at all to hinder me giving my love in its entirety to Christ and my comprehension of the Holy Bible." When he received letters he would burn them and say a prayer for the sender, being careful not to see who it was from.

³⁷ Self-awareness is continually brought up throughout the book with emphasis on family of origin issues and their tendency to follow us and affect us throughout life. Monasticism severs these ties from the

solitude that Matta experienced self-awareness, something impossible in Matta's view apart from a complete dependence upon God and reliance upon grace. Man can only know himself truly in relationship to God.³⁸ "Our human personhood consists in our relationship to the Father in Christ by the Spirit. In other words, grace is what gives humanity its identity."³⁹ This understanding would agree with what Alvesson and Sveningsson referred to as the "religious undertones" to the authentic leadership construct and their critique that only an extraordinary person like Jesus or Buddha could be considered an authentic leader. Matta's understanding would present Jesus as the only authentic leader, and other's authenticity based entirely upon their relationship and nearness to Christ.

The Scriptures along with the treasure he received in the transcripts of Lazarus Moore⁴⁰ became his guide as a novice monk and helped to form his new identity. The sayings of the Russian and Eastern Church fathers "set his heart on fire"⁴¹ as they described so accurately his own experience. Matta mentions how it is difficult to differentiate his own words from those of the fathers because their writings had been so

beginning and includes rituals that demonstrate the literal and complete death of the old man including ties to his family of origin.

³⁸ Hani Hanna, "Matta El-Meskeen's Theology of Scripture," *Word of Life* 10, no. 4 (Fall 2016): 167. "Reality may not for Matta be defined prior to our encounter with Christ. Rather, Christ defines what is real and then everything else receives its true meaning in his light."

³⁹ Hani Hanna, "The Historicized Christology of Karl Barth and Mattā al-Miskīn: A Comparison for the Sake of Ecumenical Renewal" (PhD diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 2013), 263.

⁴⁰ Chapter 5, footnote 34.

⁴¹ George Bebawi, "With the Desert Fathers of Egypt: Coptic Christianity Today," *Road to Emmaus* 10, no. 3 (Summer 2009): 3–37, accessed September 5, 2015, http://www.roadtoemmaus.net/back_issue_articles/RTE_38/With_the_Dessert_Fathers_of_Egypt.pdf, 23.

impressed on his mind and his spirit molded by their words. Burton-Christie uses the term for Matta not simply returning to, or imitating their lifestyle, but “reappropriating” the spirit of the primitive desert movement.

Imitation is often considered non-genuine and has negative connotations in the authentic leadership construct and in western culture in general.⁴² One who is imitating another is not being true to his authentic self. Yet biblically and historically, especially within the desert movement, imitation is both encouraged and expected. Paul encouraged the Corinthian believers, “Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.” Such imitation was completely natural in the Greco-Roman world. Anthony was seen as a model and his life a pattern for others to imitate.⁴³ *The Lausiatic History*, an anthology of desert ascetics and various holy men and women written by Palladius in the fifth century included an apologia for ascetic literature and its importance for discipleship.⁴⁴ “Readers should imitate an ascetic vision, not specific ascetic practices.”⁴⁵ This type of literature became

⁴² Brittany Brie Atkinson, “The Realm of the Real: Imitation and Authenticity in Edith Wharton’s *The Custom of the Country*” (MA thesis, Brigham Young University, 2011), 1. “Authenticity as a virtue and as an ideal consumed American culture at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century ... this concern for authenticity was coupled with a deep distaste for imitation.”

⁴³ Paul Van Geest, “... seeing that for monks the life of Antony is a sufficient pattern of discipline: Athanasius as Mystagogue in his *Vita Antonii*,” *Church History and Religious Culture* 90, nos. 2–3 (2010): 220. Athanasius intended his *Vita Antonii* to provide a role model for future ascetics, that they would “surpass the Egyptian monks in their *ascesis* and to imitate Antony in his fervor.”

⁴⁴ Demetrios Katos, “Holy Imitation: A Manual for Disciples,” *Christian Century*, June 28, 2011, 31. Palladius included both men and women, desert and urban dwellers, peasants and aristocrats in his anthology. “He recognized that all asceticism was merely an action, or praxis, in the classic Aristotelian sense: a means to a greater end ... Palladius promoted as authentic spiritual models only those who embraced praxis for the purpose of working out their salvation. He believed that one should practice asceticism to become receptive to God in both scripture and prayer and his examples delineate a common path of spiritual progress toward this goal.”

⁴⁵ Katos, “Holy Imitation,” 30.

popular following the fifth century and is being rediscovered in our day. “Once we admit that despite the premium our culture places on originality, we all imitate models of some kind, then it follows naturally that we should try to choose the right models.”⁴⁶ Imitation and reappropriation of the spirit of the desert fathers was Matta’s endeavor throughout his monastic life.⁴⁷ The cultural influence in the west, however, tends to discourage such imitation in favor of originality.

Matta viewed his early monastic life and calling through the lens of biblical characters and events. Self-awareness occurs as one’s own story is understood in light of the biblical narrative (chapter 3, note 4). Abraham was his favorite and mirrored his own renunciation and pursuit of the unknown.⁴⁸ Upon entering the monastery Matta acknowledged his helpless condition and need for supernatural power. “Lord, I am dead Lazarus. Can you raise me?”⁴⁹ He described how twenty-eight days later this prayer was answered and he received unusual power, like Lazarus, as one raised from the dead. He received the freedom he sought from the world and all of its bondage and chains and compared this experience to the exodus of the children of Israel. Betrothed to Christ as a pure virgin according to Paul in 1 Cor 11:2, Matta presented himself daily to his beloved. “I am every day a pure virgin for Christ.”⁵⁰ The Bible itself was his treasure and he

⁴⁶ Katos, “Holy Imitation,” 30.

⁴⁷ Emphasis is always placed on imitating Christ.

⁴⁸ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 70. “Monasticism is an Abrahamic calling.”

⁴⁹ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 67

⁵⁰ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 68.

experienced through meditation and study its sweetness spoken of in Ps 119:103—”How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth.”

I meditated on the Bible in the entirety of its two testaments and was satisfied to the full. This is the reason for the blessing, the solace, and happiness in my life. It is my support, my light, and my salvation. Every word of it makes me glad ... I tasted the meaning of the Prophet David ... The Word of God became sweeter than honey ... I tell you this to assure you that the flavor of the Word of God ... is sweeter than honey. This is what I have experienced.⁵¹

Through his study and meditation Matta came to view the biblical characters as his own family and their lives a part of his own. “When I read about Abraham and his walk, I say, ‘This is my father’ ... O how I wept when Adam sinned ... I am Adam’s grandson.”⁵²

I lived with the personalities of the Bible for days, months and then years, and I learned it is not only a story for a man to read but a revelation from God about how He deals with man and about His character and qualities. All of this reflected onto my life and I applied it to myself ... It was not for me theories or meditations; the Bible actually entered into my relationship with people and the world.⁵³

The Bible was meant to open the heart to a fuller relationship with Christ and not meant for mere intellectual knowledge or academic study according to Matta. This dynamic relationship with Christ is what enhanced self-awareness. Values, goals and purpose were formed in the desert through this relationship and transformation. Some of the most prominent core values developed during Matta’s early monastic life include: (1) the

⁵¹ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 78.

⁵² *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 79.

⁵³ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 88.

realization that what he gained was to be shared with others, (2) purity of heart was a prerequisite to fruitful ministry, (3) he had only responsibilities and no rights.

First, the insights he gained were to be shared with others and he described how this was revealed to him.

I was disciplined by the Word of God. His word was a good teacher and trainer ... many mysteries were revealed to me, but I kept them to myself. Suddenly I began receiving very little from the Word and my understanding weakened. I asked the Lord to reveal the reason, then he spoke to my heart that if I keep only for myself what I receive I would receive nothing, and that everything I receive is for others. I immediately saw my mistake, and I made a covenant that I will share everything I receive from the Lord.⁵⁴

This contradicts the false notion that solitude is self-centered and self-awareness is self-absorption. The authentic leader learns his strengths and weaknesses and is thus better able to serve others. The motivation is not self-interest but for the benefit of others, like the biblical examples given of Timothy and Epaphroditus in Philippians 2. Benefit to the monk is to give to the world—but first he needs the spiritual experience.⁵⁵ “While in the wilderness, I felt I was responsible, in the world, for the Church. Zeal consumed me for the laity, the servants, the clergy, the monks and all the people. All of this took place while I was in the desert, far removed ... there in that place, zeal consumed me.”⁵⁶ The House of Dedication in Helwan was one example of Matta giving back to the Church through his spiritual leadership to the lay people. The Sunday School was served through

⁵⁴ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 84. This was shared during a message he gave to a group of Sunday School servants in 1952.

⁵⁵ Christiane Rathle, “The Desert Militants: Change and Modernizing Factors in Coptic Monasticism” (Master’s thesis, American University of Cairo, 1987), 79.

⁵⁶ Rathle, “Desert Militants,” 83.

the translation work he continued with his disciples to provide the writings of the Church Fathers in Arabic. The Church was greatly enriched by those he discipled, both personally and through the numerous books he has written.

Second, the importance of pure motives and a pure heart are highlighted in Matta's sermons and his writings on the Bible and its effect in the believer's life.⁵⁷ Purity necessitates a growing dependence and deepening relationship with Christ. He describes how any pollution or uncleanness, pride, anger, jealousy, etc. would prevent him from receiving anything from the Spirit. His writings would stop until repentance and purity was restored.⁵⁸ Self-dependence and "moving away from Christ" which Matta described as waning efforts and not waiting on him, or "I became lazy," also resulted in spiritual lack. A failure to fully submit to the Spirit or a prideful attitude kept the Bible revelation closed. He emphasized that purity of heart and mind rather than intellect and intelligent study opens the Bible. The intention and motivation is not for knowledge alone but for a closer relationship with Christ. Oswald Chambers echoes this same emphasis in a lecture with students at the Bible Training College in London.

The insight that relates us to God arises from purity of heart, not from clearness of intellect. All the education under heaven will never give a man insight into Jesus Christ's teaching, only one thing will, and that is a pure heart, i.e., intentions that go along the right line. Education and scholarship may enable a man to put things well, but they will never give him insight. Insight only comes from a pure-heartedness in working out the will of God.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Chapter 2, footnote 61. Purity of heart was the ultimate goal of the desert monks.

⁵⁸ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 86.

⁵⁹ Oswald Chambers, *The Moral Foundations of Life: A Series of Talks on the Ethical Principles of the Christian Life* (1936; repr. Hants: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 2015).

Immediate confession and repentance of sin kept his spirit sensitive and his heart pure. With no spiritual guide Matta depended on God entirely and developed a healthy fear of the Lord lest he should fall away and have no one to lead him.

Third, Matta understood the spirit of the Bible as the spirit of redemption.⁶⁰ This went along with his understanding and his responsibilities to give back what he received. The principle he lived by was written early in his monastic life: “We have responsibilities and no rights.”⁶¹ Monasticism presented two paths and Matta modeled them both: love and devotion to Christ and service to others for their salvation. Both of these paths required renunciation.⁶² The life of Christ, loving the Father and serving others, presented the authentic model for Matta. His service was primarily through the writing of books that would benefit others and leading his disciples in the example of Christ.

Despite his strong asceticism and anchorite experience, one cannot say that he turned himself away from the world and limited himself to his personal salvation only. Father Matta El-Meskeen continuously pointed to the responsibility of Christians in society and the church. In his publications it was clear he did not neglect the large social problems of his time.^[SEP] Not withdrawal from the world, but complementary relation between withdrawal from the world and engagement with the world became characteristic of the reform of Father Matta El-Meskeen.⁶³

⁶⁰ He was bought with a price and was not his own according to 1 Pet 1:18.

⁶¹ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 91.

⁶² Chapter 2, 56. John Cassian emphasizes total renunciation of self and St Symeon (Chapter 2, footnote 81) mentions one of its purposes is for the community.

⁶³ Cornelis Hulsman, “Renewal in the Coptic Orthodox Church: Notes on the Ph.D. Thesis of Rev. Dr. Wolfram Reiss,” *Arab West Report*, November 22, 2002, accessed March 5, 2015, <http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2002/week-46/23-renewal-coptic-orthodox-church-notes-phd-thesis-revd-dr-wolfram-reiss>. “The hermit remains aware of the Church and aware of the world.” *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 118.

Matta refused to ask for anything and considered everything that came to him a blessing from God. When he lacked clothes or food in the monastery he waited for God to provide. He covenanted with God that he would never buy a book but read only what the Lord sent him. God's provision over the years would come to include over nine hundred books in his personal library. The monastic principle of forsaking the world includes not only physical possessions but titles and positions. These also Matta refused throughout his life, though he was ordained to the priesthood by compulsion. Positions and titles bring with them rights and privileges that can quickly lead to pride and self-exaltation. Monasticism is death and Matta's vow was to die to self (his rights) and live for the Lord (his responsibilities).

III. Internalized Moral Perspective

Authentic leaders rely on internal values and core principles to determine their behavior and course of action. The motivation for what they do is intrinsic rather than extrinsic and their worldview perspective is well established. Because they model consistency and reliability in their behavior, they earn credibility and trust with their followers.

The actions of leaders are consistent with their interior values and visions. This leads to ... authenticity since authentic people do not pretend to be something they are not. Authenticity is connected to integrity. Leaders have integrity if their actions and behaviors are true to what they believe. They are not two-faced ... if the leader is perceived as authentic, this perception leads to trust.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Kevin Gerard Bezy, "An Operational Definition of Spiritual Leadership" (PhD diss., Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 2011), 28.

Matta had a strong character that was formed from childhood and personal integrity that was demonstrated when he was on his own in Cairo at the university. He guarded his reputation and was known and respected by his neighbors to be an upright, moral and honest young man. His actions following graduation clearly demonstrate his sense of duty and respect for the government at a time when most were disregarding government orders. As a pharmacist Matta was honest with his customers and fair in his pricing,⁶⁵ often giving away expensive medicine to those who couldn't afford it. The discouragement from others and criticism he faced in his decision to enter monasticism demonstrate an ability to stand on principle and withstand peer pressure and negative feedback.

As a young monk early in his monastic life, Matta quickly earned the credibility and trust of the *khuddam* and the university students. They greatly loved and respected the authentic model of monasticism that Matta was living. This growing admiration and respect from the youth led to some of the early conflict that Matta would experience from within the church hierarchy. It's certainly not unusual or surprising for a person with Matta's charisma, intellectual capacity and strong convictions to experience conflict. Leadership inevitably brings conflict and strong moral leaders who are reform-minded and not afraid to upset the status quo can expect significant pushback from any organization, be it religious or secular. It's true that conflict with the ecclesiastical hierarchy and institutional Church seemed to follow Matta throughout his monastic life,

⁶⁵ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 33. Though disliked by his competitors, Matta was well respected for his honesty and uprightness. "What they sold for ten pounds I sold for two. Particularly in our days, the potential for profit in our profession was limitless because ninety percent of medicines were not shelf-ready and had to be mixed by the pharmacist. The profit margin was in the hands of the pharmacist, but I was content with a small profit."

beginning with Father Mina in Cairo, who would later become Pope Kirilos VI. Conflict occurred with Father Theophilus at the Monastery of the Syrians and later with Pope Shenouda. Many reasons could be given and, as is often the case, there are two sides to every story. From one perspective, his growing popularity among the youth and his leadership potential at such a young age certainly caught the attention of the institutional church and professional clergy. It's remarkable to consider that Matta, at the age of thirty-five and only six years into his monasticism, was requested by the Pope to serve as his deputy, the second highest ecclesiastical position in Alexandria.⁶⁶ It's also remarkable that Matta initially refused and resisted this request more than once from the Pope. His growing popularity in Alexandria led to some "misunderstanding" and his successful reforms led to opposition from the more conservative elements within the hierarchy. On more than one occasion attempts were made to discredit him and plots were hatched to impugn his character.⁶⁷ Rather than fight his opponents and injure the Church publicly, Matta quietly resigned and withdrew back to his cave. This response highlights two significant factors in the life of Matta el-Meskeen which demonstrate a strong moral perspective and principled behavior: (1) Matta was very clear in his calling and wholeheartedly committed to monasticism, and (2) Matta deeply loved the Church, the bride of Christ, as he deeply loved the Bridegroom.

⁶⁶ Meskeen, *Words for Our Time*, 11. The pope had read *The Orthodox Prayer Life* and was impressed by its content.

⁶⁷ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 127. The story is told of Matta's enemies within the Church conspiring to destroy his reputation by sending a prostitute to his residence at the patriarchal facilities at nine o'clock in the evening.

His clear sense of calling and commitment to his vocation led to disagreements with Father Mina/Pope Kirilos VI when he was asked to submit to requests that went against this calling. His adamant refusal to being ordained as a priest could have been the beginning of the trouble with Bishop Theophilus at Deir El-Surian.⁶⁸ Some within the monastery⁶⁹ and among the ecclesiastical hierarchy saw his growing popularity as a threat to the Church as he encouraged reform and was not hesitant to identify error and abuse.⁷⁰ Because the monasteries were often seen as a stepping stone to an episcopal career,⁷¹ some misunderstood Matta's intentions and perhaps considered he was simply interested in furthering his own interests and ambition. The fact that he resisted every position offered and had his name withdrawn from consideration as pope clearly demonstrates his intentions in entering the monastery were never for personal advancement or selfish

⁶⁸ Bector, "Union with Christ," 12–13. There were two reasons given by Bector for early conflicts in Matta's monasticism: 1.) "In 1948 monasticism in Egypt was very dark and weak and lacking in spiritual depth ... the monk's absolute obedience was to be unquestioning, even if his superior in the monastery was evil. The qualification that we must obey those who obey God was nowhere evident. Hence Father Matta had some conflicts with his superiors during his first years there. 2.) All others in the monastery were illiterate. But soon some other educated men joined the monastery, ambitious to gain power in the church, since the Coptic patriarch is always chosen from among the monks. They viewed Matta as a rival not realizing that his sole ambition was to live freely in God."

⁶⁹ Meskeen, *Words for Our Time*, 12. "Jealousy and spite, those chronic maladies of man, swelled the breasts of the older monks of the monastery as well as three other monasteries in Scete ... a covert conspiracy was organized once again against Abba Matta, and a general rumor was diffused which alleged that he and his disciples were planning to stage a coup of the monastery." *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 134. "The number of monks who considered themselves to be mine grew. At this, the Church became more wary, it ramped up its opposition, and jealousy and persecution from its leaders began."

⁷⁰ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 155. Matta highlighted the importance of the House of Dedication and the role of lay ministers in the church by pointing out the failure in the priesthood; "... even now (mid-twentieth century) the priests are not fulfilling their duty."

⁷¹ Anthony O'Mahony, "Tradition at the Heart of Renewal: The Coptic Orthodox Church and Monasticism in Modern Egypt," *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 7, no. 3 (2007): 173.

ambition. Rolheiser's metaphor of the monastic cell representing duty, vocation and commitment and the need to stay within these boundaries explains Matta's resistance to ecclesiastical positions in the Church and his clear sense of calling.

Be faithful to your commitments and what you are ultimately looking for will be found there. Every time you leave your cell you come back less a person: This is telling us that every time we step outside of our commitments, every time we are unfaithful, every time we walk away from what we should legitimately be doing, we come back less a person for that betrayal.⁷²

Matta's example is important and significant for an individual in any vocation. Success and popularity often lead to promotion within an organization or "church heirarchy," and ministers can easily be enticed to "leave their cell" for a position outside of their calling. Remaining faithful to one's vocation and calling requires discipline and discernment. Noewen compares it to the ability to hear and follow "a different drummer."

Discernment is a spiritual understanding and an experiential knowledge of how God is active in daily life that is acquired through disciplined spiritual practice. Discernment is faithful living and listening to God's love and direction so that we can fulfill our individual calling and shared mission.⁷³

The drumbeat in Matta's heart was pure devotion to Christ within the "walls" of the monastic cell, and this devotion to Christ naturally resulted in a deep love and devotion for the Church. As a young college student in Cairo after receiving the Gospel booklet from the Sunday School where he visited, Matta wrote on the first page, "It is my

⁷² Ron Rolheiser, "Lessons from the Monastic Cell," January 10, 2010, accessed March 5, 2015, <http://ronrolheiser.com/lessons-from-the-monastic-cell/#.Wh2MuLaZPBI>.

⁷³ Henri Nouwen, *Discernment: Reading the Signs of Daily Life* (San Francisco: Harper One, 2013), 27.

covenant and calling to serve the church of my forefathers.”⁷⁴ As O’Malley puts it, “All authentic service begins and ends with the church ... [it] has for its aim to link Christ and the community.”⁷⁵

Matta’s love for the Church can be seen in his desire and zeal for its purity and restoration. The importance he placed on the Patristic writings and their translation into Arabic from the original Greek was necessary for the Coptic Orthodox Church to rediscover and reclaim its heritage.⁷⁶ Reading and translating the patristic writings from the original languages was a priority in order to insure purity in doctrine and in practice.⁷⁷ Matta understood purity to be the unique characteristic of the Church in her role as the bride of Christ.

“If a bride disdains her purity and does not sanctify herself ... then who could be expected to love purity and strive for holiness, or come to the Bridegroom? ... the world is full of knowledge and science, as well as innumerable ideologies, but to the Church, God has entrusted a single spring, which wells up to eternal life.”⁷⁸

⁷⁴ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 27.

⁷⁵ O’Mahony, “Tradition at the Heart of Renewal,” 165.

⁷⁶ Rathle, “Desert Militants,” 78. Monks at Macarius study Greek, Hebrew, German and English in order to “deepen the biblical and consequently monastic knowledge, and to propagate the Orthodox tradition around the world.”

⁷⁷ Bebawi, “With the Desert Fathers of Egypt,” 18. “In the monastery when they copy the Fathers, they write by hand in the old way, because Matthew the Poor told them that to understand a text, you must copy it, not just read it.”

⁷⁸ Matta El-Meskeen, *True Unity Will Inspire the World*, St. Macarius Publishing, 1988, 13.

The well, like the bride, needs to be clean and pure, and the emphasis for Matta was both on purity of doctrine and purity of heart evidenced by righteous living.⁷⁹ Where the Church had drifted from these two core values, Matta was not hesitant to speak up and point out error. Conflict with the Church was the inevitable result. This was especially evident under the leadership of Pope Shenouda, a former disciple of Matta's, who took a more public and political stance in defense of the Coptic community leading to direct confrontation with the Egyptian government.⁸⁰

Father Matta El Meskeen differs with the Pope [Shenouda] regarding the Church's methodology, calling for the return to its pioneer spiritual role, objecting to its intervention in civil or political affairs—which was basically the methodology of the previous Pope Cyril VI.⁸¹

Both Matta and Pope Shenouda were reformers from the Sunday school movement and held deep convictions, both with strong personalities, and their vision for the Church did not always align.⁸² The two men came from different Sunday Schools with different ideologies (Chapter 4).

⁷⁹ Bector, "Union with Christ," 78. "The teaching of Father Matthew the Poor was rooted in purity of heart, metanoia—complete conversion towards God with all the heart and mind."

⁸⁰ Samuel Tadros, *Motherland Lost: The Egyptian and Coptic Quest for Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2013), 169. Under Pope Shenouda's leadership "the church and state had collided in a way never before seen in Egyptian history." The Pope was exiled by Anwar Sadat to Bishoy Monastery and a temporary council was formed to lead the Church in Pope Shenouda's absence. Matta spoke in support of the council and Sadat's decision and was critical of the Pope's public confrontation with the state and his political stance.

⁸¹ Saad Eddin Ibrahim, *The Copts of Egypt* (London: Minority Rights Group, 1996), 22.

⁸² John H. Watson, "Abuna Matta Meskeen: Contemporary Desert Mystic," *Coptic Church Review* 27, nos. 3–4 (2006): 91. Father Matthew the Poor firmly believed that the current movement for Coptic revival lost its bearings whenever it allowed itself to become too involved in communal and political action ... Politics was not at the center of Abuna Matta El Meskeen's monastic life. He was quite certain that any attachment to politics was against the spirit of Christianity.

They represent different but complementary views on church reform: Shenouda as a leader of congregations and a teacher of doctrine, and Matta as a father of revival within Egypt's ancient desert monasteries. These two leaders have very different personalities ... Matta [is seen] as a natural leader, although he had no place in the church hierarchy. Shenouda [is described] as strongly hierarchical in his leadership style.⁸³

Pope Shenouda had been a disciple of Matta's at Deir El-Surian in the 1950s and it was unfortunate that their relationship was strained thirty years later. Both men contributed significantly to the revival and growth of the Coptic Orthodox Church, but the sectarian tensions and political currents in Egypt in the 1970s took the two men in different directions.⁸⁴ Matta's appeal to President Anwar Sadat to step in "and protect the church as an institution" shortly before Pope Shenouda was exiled by the state to Bishoy Monastery in 1981 demonstrates more his love and concern for the church than his opposition to the Pope. He supported Sadat's actions and this was interpreted by Pope Shenouda as a betrayal. Matta was referred to afterwards as "the rebellious monk"⁸⁵

⁸³ Cornelis Hulsman, "Reviving an Ancient Faith: Two Strong-Willed Reformers Bring Orthodoxy Back to Life," *Christianity Today*, December 3, 2001, 38.

⁸⁴ Hulsman, "Reviving an Ancient Faith," 40. Pope Shenouda as leader of the Coptic Church took a more aggressive and confrontational approach to the Islamist threat and the government's lack of response to protect the Christians of Egypt. Matta and others believed the church should be less involved in political affairs. "Many Coptic intellectuals and clergy publically blamed Pope Shenouda for inflaming tensions with his high-profile protests against injustices."

⁸⁵ Hulsman, "Reviving an Ancient Faith," 40. Matta considered Pope's Shenouda's appointment to be the beginning of the trouble. "The mind replaced inspiration and planning replaced prayer ... For the first years I prayed for him, but I see the church is going from bad to worse because of his behavior ... I can't say I'm happy. But I am at peace now. Every morning I was expecting news of more bloody collisions. Sadat's actions protect the church and the Copts. They are from God."

IV. Balanced Processing

Balanced processing refers to an individual's ability to consider multiple perspectives and willingness to listen to alternative viewpoints. Decisions are deliberately made after assessing the impact and ramifications on the group rather than simply on the individual.

To be authentic and effective, leaders must be viewed as making the transition from the "I" position, based on leader needs and role requirements, to the "We" position, striving for congruence between leader behavior and follower needs. Successful authentic leaders do not change who they are, but rather they modify their presentations based on leader-follower interactions.⁸⁶

Matta demonstrated this ability in his relationship with his disciples and with the Coptic Church as an institution. The conflicts that arose from Matta's growing popularity and influence certainly affected his followers. The potential for negative consequences on his disciples as a result of their loyalty to him were often a concern and consideration as Matta determined the best course of action. Both in Alexandria and at Deir El-Surian, Matta chose to quietly withdraw rather than provoke a public confrontation with his detractors. Such a confrontation would certainly have negatively affected his followers in particular and the Coptic Church in general. Matta's genuine concern for others is shown in his desire to protect them from the opposition and enmity that was directed at him personally. His departure from Deir El-Surian in 1956 was an attempt to ease tensions and he instructed his disciples to stay and thereby shield them from the trouble.⁸⁷ Their

⁸⁶ Gardner, Avolio, and Walumbra, *Authentic Leadership Theory and Practice*, 144–145.

⁸⁷ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 148. Matta discerned when it was necessary to shield his disciples from problems and when it was beneficial to involve them in carrying the burden with him. In this way his followers developed a sense of belonging and teamwork and could witness together the miraculous provision and protection of the Lord. One such incident occurred at St. Samuel's when funds were needed

loyalty was displayed in their disobedience (chapter 5, note 41). His compassion and concern for others upon his return to St Samuel's determined his decision to remain and help improve the condition of the monastery. "Our spiritual father cringed in concern as he begged God to take care of these men who were so downtrodden in their need and hopeless privation."⁸⁸ Before the move to Wadi El-Rayan, Matta discussed with the group of disciples their different options, and they came to an agreement and decision together.⁸⁹ Matta's ability to engage with and work alongside contractors and common laborers in the rebuilding of St. Samuel's and later St. Macarius demonstrates his skill in dealing with others and accomplishing a common goal.⁹⁰ Discernment was often needed in dealing with the bedouin in Wadi El-Rayan. His skill at counseling and reconciling others was clearly demonstrated in Alexandria,⁹¹ and the numerous reforms he instituted there in less than a year and a half indicate his ability to work effectively with others

to pay the workers' salaries. "Our father gathered us and told us the situation, so that we could carry with him this concern and see the work of God." They witnessed God's supernatural provision that evening when a Jeep arrived from Alexandria "with enough to pay for all the workers wages."

⁸⁸ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 142.

⁸⁹ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 167.

⁹⁰ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 147. "The workers were those who had been rejected by society, and the ability to deal with them required wisdom. Our father would say, 'Because the monks were unable to face such perverted workers, God gave me grace to deal with these type of men, so that we could complete construction of the monastery.'" One particular contractor named Mustafa, who initially was deceptive and tried to take advantage of Matta, later returned to the monastery and stated, "From now on I am your servant, the monastery's servant, and I am willing to do any service." "Because of the influence of our spiritual father's love, [Mustafa] transformed into a meek and extremely faithful man in his work."

⁹¹ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 128. "Around him gathered university professors, doctors, engineers, lawyers, businessmen and city leaders. They had discussions ... asked questions, and he would respond. They all testified that he led them into a relationship with God and into a continuing bond of connection with him."

within a hostile environment.⁹² The House of Dedication at Helwan was an opportunity for Matta to provide spiritual leadership for laymen who wanted to consecrate their lives to service and ministry. Matta proved effective in numerous settings and with a wide variety of people, both educated and uneducated, married and celibate, blue collar and white collar, laity and clergy, Muslim and Christian. Among his own disciples and fellow monks, he was viewed “as a team leader without pretensions to leadership.”⁹³ This inner core of faithful and loyal followers continued with Matta from Deir El-Surian, St. Samuels, Wadi El-Rayan and eventually St. Macarius with no compulsion other than their deep love and respect for their spiritual father.

Matta’s openness to other perspectives and willingness to consider different viewpoints is evidenced by his personal library which contained numerous Christian authors from outside the Coptic Church.⁹⁴ His reaction to the Sunday School leader’s negative comments against Protestants is an early example of his ecumenical spirit.⁹⁵ At a

⁹² *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 128. These would include the foundation of a clerical college, industrial school and supervision of religious instruction in the schools. Demographic information was gathered to provide visitation and pastoral service and a system of charities was developed. Methods to obtain official certificates were modernized, accountability of religious ministries was established, patriarchal resources developed and the priesthood was bolstered.

⁹³ Hulsman, “Reviving an Ancient Faith,” 38.

⁹⁴ Fouad Youssef, “The Concept of Freedom in God According to Father Matta El-Meskeen,” *The Word of Life* 10, no. 4 (Fall 2016): 174. His willingness to read and reference outside sources resulted in his writings being ‘devoid of fanaticism’. “The writings of Father Matta were also characterized by their inclusivity ... they included the latest scientific ideas and discoveries ... as well as views of contemporary scholars.”

⁹⁵ Tadros, *Motherland Lost*, 156. Difference between the two Sunday Schools, Giza and Shubra, is highlighted by the former’s tendency toward ecumenism. Some from the St. Antony group in Shubra labeled the Giza group ‘Protestant’. Pope Shenouda came from St. Antony in Shubra while Matta came from the Sunday School in Giza. “Father Matta El-Meskeen was personally very ecumenical in spirit and open to cooperation with Protestants.”

young age he recognized how leaders tend to perpetuate conflict and division and enslave the minds of the youth. He, like Lazarus Moore, could be described as anti-institutional. The freedom in God he sought through monasticism was a struggle in many ways and included the struggle against what he termed “racism and fanaticism.”

One feature characterizing freedom and civilized thinking was his acceptance of opposing views; rather than wasting time objecting to frozen ideas, he offered his unbridled views with ease and clarity to all takers, and to whoever valued freedom in Christ Jesus—Who never forced anyone to follow Him.⁹⁶

As much as he loved the Coptic Orthodox Church, he saw her isolation and spiritual condition a result of her own enslavement to this fanaticism and lack of freedom.⁹⁷

We have done this to ourselves, by our own hands. We have firmly closed ourselves within these bounds by our fanaticism, due to our fear, loneliness, and denominational division ... We are overwhelmed by this fanaticism, which in reality is a darkness of vision, an imprisonment of mind, one which limits and controls all our relationships.⁹⁸

His attitude toward other churches was evident in his willingness to meet their leaders,⁹⁹ allow Catholic priests to enter the monastic community at St. Macarius and maintain links with several monasteries abroad. He enthusiastically hosted Lazarus Moore, former Anglican priest, convert to Russian Orthodoxy, and translator of the “treasure” Matta

⁹⁶ Youssef, “Concept of Freedom in God,” 172.

⁹⁷ Bector, “Union with Christ,” 5. This can be seen in Matta’s disagreement with the Sunday School leader concerning Protestants. The leader’s response highlights the Coptic Church’s position to all those outside of the Orthodox faith. “The leader replied by saying that they should have no dealings with them, since it was wrong for them to give their hands to any who disagreed with the Orthodox faith.” This attitude Matta considered ‘fanaticism’.

⁹⁸ Bector, “Union with Christ,” 7–8.

⁹⁹ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 152. Matta’s meeting in 1960 with Father George Khedr from the Roman Orthodox Church of Syria and Lebanon helped lead to a restoration of unity among the Orthodox families divided since the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD.

received before entering St. Samuel's. His quotes from the Russian fathers in his book *The Orthodox Prayer Life*¹⁰⁰ has made Matta highly regarded within the Russian Orthodox Church.¹⁰¹ "He also earned the admiration of Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox scholars and theologians."¹⁰² "He represented the free, open, and impartial thinking. This openness, though, did not effect his untainted theological views, which remained steadfastly anchored in the Gospel's truth."¹⁰³

V. Relational Transparency

Transparency builds credibility and trust with followers when the leader recognizes appropriate times and places to share personal struggles and weaknesses. Such honesty prevents the false perception of the leader being larger-than-life and super-human in nature. The relationships forged in the desert encouraged transparency and honesty as a necessity for spiritual progress. The *abbas* of the early desert movement were not hesitant to share their own personal struggles with their disciples as the disciples shared their thoughts and temptations with the *abbas*. "The center of the desert life was about opening up: of self to another and of self to God, with no obsessive concentration

¹⁰⁰ Watson, "Abuna Matta Meskeen," 84.

¹⁰¹ Shenouda Bishoy, "Father Matthew the Poor," *Coptic Church Review* 27, nos. 3–4 (Fall–Winter 2006): 96. The story is told of a pious Russian Orthodox nun who had read Matta's book *The Communion of Love* many times and commented, "Father Matthew the Poor is my hero."

¹⁰² Hanna, "Matta El-Meskeen's Theology of Scripture," 10. A primary reason for this admiration and appeal to Christians worldwide was his theology was grounded in Patristic theology. "A main reason why Matta's theology demonstrates concreteness and ecumenical hospitality is that it is grounded in Patristic theology. The distinctive mark of Patristic theology is reasoning from Scripture and experience of worship. As such, theory was not an end in itself ... the goal was not only to understand but to love. Life and doctrine were two sides of the same coin."

¹⁰³ Hanna, "Matta El-Meskeen's Theology of Scripture," 10.

on the self or on the relationship with one's *abba* ... the goal of the desert was utter transparency to divine light.”¹⁰⁴

The integrity and transparency of Matta El-Meskeen is highlighted in a story he shared in a sermon in 1976. He admitted as a young man that while walking in Alexandria on the waterfront, he “sinned with his eyes while looking at the beach.” He goes on to describe the conviction he felt and the commitment he made to purity.

In horror I felt something evil entering my entire being. I was so distressed and I went to an isolated place and [prayed], “Lord, I want to live for you, but I do not want to struggle for you if in the end I will be lost and destroyed because my eyes wander here and there ... Lord, if my eyes are not simple, freely looking right and left, I cry out and beg you, give me pure eyes.” Before this I had not known what it means to have simple eyes, but I gained experience, experience grew, and I began to understand the meaning of simple eyes.¹⁰⁵

Stories of personal struggle and spiritual progress were shared openly and honestly with his disciples. Matta did not consider himself a preacher or teacher but communicated through informal talks and conversations the truths he wanted to convey.

Abba Matta never gave what we would properly call a sermon. This was a point he insisted on with the utmost persistence ... “I don’t know how to deliver a sermon. All I know how to do is deliver to you what I have lived”. The listener immediately receives the impression that his words are genuine. Rarely can recorded lessons be found that are so free of the desire to impress, persuade, criticize, or moralize.

He confessed his fears of leadership and the responsibility of caring for the needs of his followers while at St. Samuel’s. “Being responsible for thirteen monks is a terrifying

¹⁰⁴ Columba Stewart, “The Desert Fathers on Radical Self-Honesty,” *Vox Benedictina: A Journal of Translations from Monastic Sources* 8, no. 1 (1991): 27.

¹⁰⁵ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 28.

thing.”¹⁰⁶ He felt the same fear and anxiety at Wadi El-Rayan. It was here that the darkness of his own heart was revealed following the actions of the Church against him. He shared this experience openly with his followers and modeled forgiveness toward his persecutors and repentance toward God. “You all know my walk with Christ because it is not hidden.”¹⁰⁷ To a group of young monks in 1976 he shared his many trials and struggles in monasticism, attributing them rightly to Satan and not to people, and credited the love of Christ and the Word of God for sustaining him. He admonished them not to defend themselves quoting 1 Cor 4:12–13, “When we are cursed we bless; when we are persecuted we endure it; when we are slandered we answer kindly.” His credibility with these young monks was established because he had modeled what he was teaching them. In a letter to one of his disciples in 1965 Matta shares candidly about the love of God and his own spiritual condition, using words like “my ignorance,” “my small-mindedness,” “my foulness,” and “my obscenity.” “Love is a refining fire, teacher of the truth, merciless disciplinarian, and an inspiration that exposes what is covered and rebukes what is hidden ... Love pounces on my conscience more fearlessly than the fires of hell.”¹⁰⁸ We need to live what we believe more than we need to change what we believe.

¹⁰⁶ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 140.

¹⁰⁷ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 170.

¹⁰⁸ *Abuna Matta El-Meskeen*, 187.

CHAPTER 7: AUTHENTIC PENTECOSTAL LEADERSHIP

Go sit in your cell and your cell will teach you everything.

—Abba Moses

In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there.

—Mark 1:35

The purpose of this research project has been to examine the life of Matta El-Meskeen and find elements of his life that could provide a model of leadership for contemporary Pentecostal pastors. What are the biblical principles discovered and insights gained that could improve congregational leadership in the Pentecostal church? This chapter provides the normative construct in Osmer's model of practical theology and answers the question, "How might we respond." Obviously Pentecostal pastors in America do not need to relocate to the barren wilderness of Egypt or the southwestern desert regions of the United States to become effective Christian leaders. The disciplines of the desert are not exclusive to that particular environment, although its isolation and barrenness provides ideal space for spiritual formation. Matta maintains that the necessary ingredient for spiritual leadership is discernment which is attained through the spiritual disciplines of silence, solitude and long prayers. Fasting was often combined with these disciplines.

I. Practicing Spiritual Disciplines

The hectic pace of life in America leaves little space or time for these critical disciplines. Busy has become a cultural virtue and accurately describes the life of the

contemporary minister in the US In his book *Addicted to Busy*, Pastor Brady Boyd highlights the importance of healthy rhythms and the terrible consequences of neglecting times of rest and renewal. These can include frustration, burnout, depression and moral failure. American pastors, many of whom have families to care for and often work second jobs to meet financial obligations, are increasingly experiencing the effects of going too fast. “Speed is the single greatest threat to a healthy life.”¹ Pentecostalism, much like the desert monks and monasticism, was a counter-cultural movement. Priorities and values were rearranged in keeping with biblical principles. Silence, solitude and prayer are counter-cultural to the busy pace of post-modern society and set the priority for Christian ministry on being rather than doing.

This alienation of Pentecostals from the culture owes to their “otherworldly orientation”. This means we are considering ourselves to be sojourners who are traveling to a city beyond ... Pentecostal spirituality questions the legitimacy of this world’s prevailing realities; it demonstrates an alternative vision of God’s new world, through the power of the Spirit.²

At the heart of Pentecostal spirituality is the belief that God is present and available and can be experienced personally and powerfully as the believer is engaged in relationship through worship and prayer. Such a belief would naturally lead to a priority placed upon time alone with God in solitude, silence and prayer. For the Pentecostal

¹ Daniel Darling, “Finding Rest in a Busy World: An Interview with Brady Boyd,” *Christianity Today*, August 2014, accessed October 15, 2017, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2014/august-online-only/finding-rest-in-busy-world.html>. “Every problem I see in every person I know ultimately is a problem of moving too fast for too long in too many aspects of life. And I see a lot of problems.”

² Samuel Eapen, “Setting Trends on the Way: Pentecostalism as a Counterculture,” *IPC Theological Seminary Media and Publications*, accessed October 10, 2017, <http://ipcseminary.com/FacultyArticles/Setting%20Trends%20on%20the%20Way-%20Pentecostalism%20as%20a%20Counterculture.pdf>.

pastor, neglecting these disciplines would lead one to question how genuine is this core belief. Statistics on Christian ministers in the US indicate that only sixteen percent are very satisfied with their prayer life and the median amount of time spent praying is thirty minutes.³ Over fifty percent of pastors pray less than one hour each day with nearly twenty percent of these praying less than one half hour. This includes both corporate and individual prayer.⁴ Busyness and overextended obligations and responsibilities are often signs of a deeper heart issue where unbelief and self-reliance are disguised as “hands-on” and “hardworking.” The story of Martha and Mary highlights the priority and the necessity of time alone with Jesus. There simply is no substitute. “One thing is necessary!”

Actually, two things are necessary for this one thing—time and space. Regular, scheduled, intentional and habitual times of getting alone with God for fellowship, worship and prayer are critical for the Pentecostal pastor. This would include daily personal prayer, meditation and Bible study, along with regularly scheduled times away for spiritual retreat. The space can be anywhere, preferably not too large, and with few distractions. Jesus mentioned the prayer “closet” or “inner room.” It can be a literal closet, home office, outdoor shed, church sanctuary, etc. Much like the monk’s cell, it is the sacred space for private communion with God. It’s called a discipline because the temptation to avoid this time and space or leave this time and space prematurely will be a

³ Toni Ridgaway, “Statistics on Prayer in the U.S.,” *Church Leaders*, May 5, 2011, accessed October 15, 2017, <https://churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/150915-u-s-statistics-on-prayer.html>.

⁴ Richard Krejcir, “Research Statistics on Pastors: 2016 Update,” *Church Leadership*, 2016, accessed October 20, 2017, <http://www.churchleadership.org/apps/articles/default.asp?blogid=4545&view=post&articleid=Statistics-on-Pastors-2016-Update&link=1&fldKeywords=&fldAuthor=&fldTopic=0>.

constant battle. The mind is assaulted with numerous things to do, thoughts of other people, friends and foes, lusts, and wandering thoughts. The desert fathers called these thoughts *logismoi* and developed the skill of discernment to determine their origin. “We have learnt, after much observation, to recognize the difference between angelic thoughts, human thoughts, and thoughts that come from demons.”⁵ Perseverance and consistency along with God’s grace and the work of the Spirit will insure progress and growth. Short retreats for solitude can be scheduled once or twice a year depending on time. A cabin in the mountains or a cottage on a lake can substitute for the monk’s cave. Many Assembly of God churches, especially in rural areas, have efficiency apartments available for short-term stay and provide a simple and cost-effective retreat. District campgrounds offer another opportunity for a simple retreat. Authors Kethledge and Erwin argue that long retreats are simply not an option for many today but encourage finding small segments of time throughout the day, such as during exercise or commutes to work, to practice solitude. The benefits they discovered in their research include clarity, creativity, emotional balance and moral courage—characteristics very similar to the authentic leadership model.

The ultimate goal for the monk in the desert was unceasing prayer when silence and solitude became an inner reality. The desert disciplines practiced consistently would begin to produce an inner stillness and calmness⁶ that no longer relied entirely on time and space. The monk’s cell became the inner sanctuary of the heart and prayer became a

⁵ G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware, eds., *The Philokalia* (London: Faber & Faber, 1995), 38. Evagrius Ponticus.

⁶ It was understood that the disciplines simply prepared the soil and the grace of God administered by the Holy Spirit produced the work.

continual flow of worship, praise and awareness of God's presence. The stillness would enhance self-awareness and attentiveness would then lead to better discernment. This inner work of the Spirit would give the Pentecostal pastor a reservoir of wisdom and strength to draw from for the practical work of the ministry. The contrast between this inner work of the Spirit through silence, solitude and prayer and the Christian leader who neglects these disciplines is seen in Jas 3:13-17; wisdom from above that is pure and peaceful, gentle and reasonable and without hypocrisy as opposed to jealousy, selfish ambition and disorder.

Sermon preparation requires time spent in God's presence, otherwise the pastor becomes like those described in Jer 23:16—they are leading into futility; they speak a vision of their own imagination, not from the mouth of the Lord. Effective pastoral ministry is simply not possible apart from standing in the council of the Lord, hearing His voice and then communicating His word to the congregation. Jesus spent all night in prayer before delivering the Sermon on the Mount. "If our sermons are going to reach the hearts and consciences of the people, we must be much in prayer to God, that there may be power with the word."⁷ Preston Busch, in his thesis entitled "Silence, Solitude, Prayer and Contemplation as Spiritual Disciplines Essential to Formation of Effective Preachers," highlights the lack of emphasis on spiritual formation in seminary training as one reason why these disciplines are neglected by many pastors today. "A recent survey of pastors brought out the confession that in the intensity of their theological studies and

⁷ Dwight L. Moody, *Prevailing Prayer* (Chicago: Moody, 1987), 13.

professional preparation, they failed to develop the spiritual disciplines and resources by which they can respond in depth to the needs of their people.”⁸

A quick glance at Assemblies of God affiliated universities and Christian/Church leadership majors at both the undergraduate and graduate level show the emphasis on academics and skills rather than spirituality.

Seminaries and Bible Colleges have done a poor job at properly preparing ministers of the Word ... too many pastors are graduating with Graduate Degrees in Divinity or a Biblical Science who do not know how to build their faith or know the Word, or how to teach or disciple Christ’s precepts, or how to lead and manage a church.⁹

The second reason Busch highlights is the confusion between professionalism and spirituality in the ministry. E. Glenn Wagner argues that the Church has adopted a CEO business model of ministry and minimized the pastor-shepherd role. The corporation has replaced the community, leaving pastors frustrated, over-worked and under-nourished spiritually. He helped to found the Seminary of the East which emphasized relational ministry, pairing students with lay-mentors and pastors and developing character through spiritual disciplines such as prayer and fasting.

We wanted our students to mature not only intellectually but also in their hearts and lives. We wanted them to experience vital relationships. We hoped that as students walked through this process, they would so fall in love with it that they would practice the model for the rest of their ministries.¹⁰

⁸ Preston Busch, “Silence, Solitude, Prayer and Contemplation as Spiritual Disciplines Essential to Formation of Effective Preachers” (DMin thesis, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 2004), 3-4.

⁹ Krejcir, “Research Statistics on Pastors.”

¹⁰ E. Glenn Wagner, *Escape from Church, Inc.: The Return of the Pastor-Shepherd* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 62.

This relational model is similar to the practice of the desert monks and the spiritual fathers who mentored and guided them. Wagner goes on to explain the tragic consequences of the Church buying into gimmicks, fads and church growth strategies calling it a “subtle heresy.”

Like Esau, we pastors have sold our biblical birthright as shepherds called by God for the pottage of skills and gimmicks designed by humans. We have misunderstood the role of pastor and defined it incorrectly. We have left our biblical and theological moorings. The result? Our churches are struggling mightily, Christians are wandering from the faith, and pastors are burning out at alarming rates.¹¹

The decline of the American church and its influence in society is an obvious indicator that something is wrong. The experts have come up with a number of reasons why and have offered, at a price, the silver bullet and quick-fix solution. It changes every five to ten years, but the decline in the American church continues.

WWMD? — What would Matta do if he were mentoring Pentecostal pastors in America today. He would first remind them of their heritage and encourage a return to an emphasis on spirituality and character development through the desert disciplines. Early Pentecostals saw their movement as a restoration of the early Church in Acts. The leadership of the early Church made a decision and commitment early on in Acts 6:4—”But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” In 1920 the Chairman of the General Council of the Assemblies of God, Elder W. T. Gaston, wrote an article in *The Pentecostal Evangel* entitled “A Watchword for the Pentecostal Ministry.” It was a reminder to pastors that the natural tendency for all spiritual revival

¹¹ Wagner, *Escape from Church, Inc.*, 89.

movements in Church history was to quickly fade and be followed by decline, backsliding and apostasy. He laid the fault primarily at the feet of the Christian minister.

The largest share of responsibility lies at the door of the ministry. To every servant and handmaiden whose heart yearns that copious showers of latter rain may continue and increase upon us, I beg to suggest this little verse from holy Writ as a watchword: “We will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word.”¹²

There simply is no failure in ministry, according to Gaston, to the one who heeds this word. Failure comes when the minister allows the busyness of the urgent (the widows in Acts 6) to replace what is critically important. “A great many preachers since that day have failed God and backslidden because of too much business.”¹³

In the Coptic monasteries prayer begins at three o’clock in the morning and lasts for three to four hours. This practice models the biblical account of Jesus rising early in the morning and praying in a solitary place. Silence and solitude could be experienced and enjoyed in the early morning hours in nearly any pastoral home. Matta would encourage Pentecostal pastors to make early morning prayer a consistent discipline and regular routine. During this devotional time of prayer, Bible reading and meditation, articles from the early 1900s *Pentecostal Evangel* and *Latter Rain Evangel* along with biographies of Pentecostal pioneers could be read devotionally. Much like the patristic writings impressed the spirit of the fathers on Matta’s spirituality, the writings of Pentecostal pioneers could do the same for contemporary pastors. *The Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center* has these magazines digitalized and available online. This

¹² W. T. Gaston, “A Watchword for the Pentecostal Ministry,” *The Pentecostal Evangel*, February 20, 1926, accessed October 11, 2017, http://ifphc.org/pdf/PentecostalEvangel/1920-1929/1926/1926_02_20.pdf#Page2, 2.

¹³ Gaston, “Watchword for the Pentecostal Ministry,” 2.

would provide in part the necessity for spiritual fathers in the formation and discipleship of younger Pentecostal pastors.

Structurally the Assemblies of God in the US is made up of district councils in each state and various ethnic groups and are led by a district superintendent along with regional and sectional presbyters. Relationships among pastors within the district and with district officials varies, but oftentimes younger pastors in smaller churches are isolated with little spiritual support and help. Intentional efforts on the part of the district to connect younger ministers with older and more experienced pastors and presbyters is a necessity and in keeping with the core value of cooperative fellowship. Statistics show 58 percent of pastors feel they do not have any good true friends¹⁴ and a greater percentage experience frequent loneliness. Matta experienced little support and help from his spiritual father during his early years at St. Samuel's and intentionally sought out elder monks experienced in the eremitic life. He later established a model at St. Macarius, more in keeping with the practice of the desert fathers, where novice monks would be given a spiritual father for guidance and help. Mentors and coaching are the contemporary terminology for spiritual fathers, but very few pastors are truly experiencing this type of relationship in their ministerial life. Matta would encourage younger ministers to intentionally seek out and learn from the experience of older pastors. Structurally more can be done on a local and district level to provide younger pastors and others who feel isolated with spiritual mentors to provide encouragement, advice and support.

¹⁴ Krejcir, "Research Statistics on Pastors."

The busyness of pastoral ministry and the stress, fatigue and burnout that it can cause are evident in the physical and emotional health of the contemporary pastor. An observation made by Krejcir's research highlighted that nearly half of pastors today are "very unhealthy."

Many pastors today ... are ... overweight, with health problems stemming from poor food intake and excess junk food, a lack of exercise, and to a lesser extent, alcohol. Three doctors I talked to who see a lot of pastors have told me there is significant increase of hypertension, obesity, cardiovascular problems, and depression.¹⁵

The problem of obesity in American society today can be found in both the pulpit and the pew. A study by the University of Purdue found that church members are more overweight than the general population,¹⁶ and "members of the clergy now suffer from obesity, hypertension and depression at rates higher than most Americans."¹⁷ Throughout their monastic life Matta and his disciples modeled the ancient desert practice of combining physical work with a healthy diet. Abstaining from meat, sweets and alcohol, they ate natural foods grown at the monastery and baked their own bread. They also practiced regular seasons of fasting. Pastors today should be modeling the same healthy lifestyle of physical work/exercise and proper nutrition, along with seasons of fasting. Matta would introduce the Pentecostal pastor to the benefits of regular fasting and discipline in their diet. The writings of the church fathers have much to say about proper

¹⁵ Krejcir, "Research Statistics on Pastors."

¹⁶ Wendy Ashley, "Obesity in the Body of Christ," *Journal of the Southern Baptist Convention*, January 2007, accessed November 5, 2017, <http://www.sbclife.net/Articles/2007/01/sla8>.

¹⁷ Uri Scaramanga, "Pastors are Fatter, Sicker and More Depressed," *Christianity Today*, August 2010, accessed November 5, 2017, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2010/august-online-only/pastors-are-fatter-sicker-more-depressed.html>.

eating and highlight the correlation between food and the spiritual life. The stomach was considered “the queen of passions” and food the downfall of humanity “through which we have lost our original divine status.”

For when the stomach is heavy the intellect is clouded, and you cannot pray resolutely and with purity. On the contrary, made drowsy by the effects of too much food you are soon induced to sleep; and as you sleep the food produces countless fantasies in your mind.¹⁸

The fathers believed it was impossible to hear from God on a full stomach and excess food prevented the ability to discern properly. Though there was no legalistic requirement for how much food to eat, “for bodies vary greatly in their need for food,” the principle teaching encouraged self-control and sufficiency and warned against satiety. “Self-control is to be hungry after having eaten. Sufficiency is to be neither hungry nor weighed down. Satiety is to be slightly weighed down. To eat again after reaching the point of satiety is to open the door of gluttony, through which unchastity comes in.”¹⁹

An article in the *Pentecostal Evangel* entitled “Diet and Discipleship” echoes St. Gregory of Sinai and reminds the reader that “partaking of food was the act that first got man into trouble with the Almighty.” Speaking of the ancient Hebrews the article goes on to mention that “eating ... could not be divorced from things spiritual.” Though the New Testament gives the believer freedom, as all foods are considered clean, overeating was considered sinful and harmful to both the body and the spirit. Discernment is negatively affected as evidenced by the people in the days of Noah and Lot.

¹⁸ Palmer, Sherrard, and Ware, *Philokalia*, 4: 281 (6). St. Gregory of Sinai.

¹⁹ Palmer, Sherrard, and Ware, *Philokalia*, 4: 281 (6). St. Gregory of Sinai.

Jesus admonished that men would be as they were in the days of Noah and Lot: “They did eat and drink.” Their appetites were associated with their insensitiveness to the approaching judgment. As it was with Belshazzar, the handwriting on the wall appears at the hour of gormandizing.²⁰

An earlier article in *The Pentecostal Evangel* in 1926 mentioned one of the weaknesses in the church was a result of over indulgence in appetite. “It is clear, beyond question, that care in eating and occasional abstinence from food is conducive to health and vigor. It is not from the standpoint of *health* that I am led to write this message, but rather from the standpoint of *spiritual efficiency* (emphasis original).”²¹

A recent article on CNBC highlighted a growing trend in Silicon Valley where a growing number of CEOs and technology executives practice “intermittent fasting” to improve their health and lose weight. Investor and former CEO of Evernote Phil Libin describes his experience as a type of “euphoria” and mentions “improved clarity and focus” as an additional benefit of fasting.²² What the secular world is discovering, the church in America has all but forgotten. Pentecostal pastors need to reclaim this discipline as a regular practice and model a healthy lifestyle, both spiritually and physically, to their congregation.

II. Developing Spiritual Discernment

Improved clarity and focus are what Pentecostal pastors need to lead their congregations effectively. Matta called this “spiritual insight” and the desert fathers

²⁰ Lon Woodrum, “Diet and Discipleship,” *The Pentecostal Evangel*, September 1, 1963, 20-21.

²¹ W. E. Moody, “Fasting—Is It Necessary?” *The Pentecostal Evangel*, March 13, 1926, 2.

²² Christina Farr, “The Former CEO of Evernote Has Lost 80 Pounds by Fasting, and He’s Part of a Growing Trend in Silicon Valley,” *CNBC*, June 7, 2017, accessed November 5, 2017. <https://www.cnbc.com/2017/06/07/phil-libin-fasting-weight-loss.html>.

called it discrimination, or discernment. Both agree that without it, spiritual progress is not possible and spiritual leadership is dangerous. Jesus said it this way in Luke 6:39: A blind man cannot guide a blind man, can he? Will they not both fall into a pit? The text goes on to speak of the disciple becoming like his teacher, learning first to remove the log from his own eye before attempting to help others with the speck in their eyes. The result will be good fruit and good treasure flowing from a pure heart.

A. Self-Awareness

Discernment begins with the individual pastor growing in self-awareness as the spiritual disciplines are practiced and the Holy Spirit reveals the inner workings of the heart. “Gaining self-awareness begins with understanding your life story and framing your crucibles. Then you need to reflect on your experiences through introspection and get feedback from those who know you best.”²³ The research conducted by Krejcir concluded that “the biggest problems [pastors face] stem from a lack of desire to please Christ, a lack of love for one another, a lack of spiritual growth and a lack of prayer.”²⁴ Robert Quinn argues that one person can change the larger system and the organization (as Matta brought change to the Coptic monasteries), but this requires deep change in the individual first. Discernment reveals where personal change needs to occur and gives an honest assessment of the true condition of the heart. Why is there a lack of desire to please Christ and a lack of love for one another? These are “logs” in the eyes of

²³ Bill George, *Discover Your True North: Becoming an Authentic Leader* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), Kindle, 1770.

²⁴ Krejcir, “Research Statistics on Pastors.”

contemporary pastors. The statistics reveal that two thirds of pastors “do not feel good enough to meet expectations.”²⁵ Are these expectations reasonable and biblical or are they self-imposed or imposed by church members and lay-leaders? Unreasonable expectations create stress and pressure and lead to frustration and discouragement. Matta faced the pressure of expectations others placed upon him and struggled with his calling, but eventually broke free. A new perspective was gained once that change occurred. Breaking free is the “discipline to unplug, to make oneself inaccessible cleanly and without peeking—which takes courage, since these days that defies convention.”²⁶ The authors are speaking about the necessity of solitude in leadership and give examples from the lives of such leaders as Lincoln, Churchill and Martin Luther King. They maintain that times of solitude²⁷ in small segments can be found throughout the day, “it just requires the discipline to do so.” The other necessity mentioned, “indeed the part that must come first is awareness—awareness of what we lose with accessibility, of what is lost inside—to the detriment, ultimately of leadership.”²⁸

Personal spiritual transformation was a core value of early Pentecostalism. Sometimes lost in the emphasis on spiritual signs and power for service was the priority these pioneers placed on “being” rather than “doing.” Blumhofer highlights this in her

²⁵ Krejcir, “Research Statistics on Pastors.”

²⁶ Raymond Kethledge and Michael Erwin, *Lead Yourself First: Inspiring Leadership Through Solitude*. (NY: Bloomsbury, 2017), Kindle, 210.

²⁷ They call this time ‘white space’ when nothing is scheduled on the calendar and emphasize the need to be deliberate and intentional in using this time as opportunities for solitude. Solitude is defined as ‘isolating the mind from the inputs of other minds’; to be able to focus and work on a problem on its own.

²⁸ Raymond Kethledge and Michael Erwin, *Lead Yourself First: Inspiring Leadership Through Solitude* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017), Kindle, 212.

introduction and mentions that contemporary Pentecostals lean more towards an understanding of Spirit baptism as empowerment for service rather than personal piety. Many early Pentecostal leaders, however, “made personal holiness and Christlikeness their primary objective.”

Many early Pentecostals, and among them founders of the Assemblies of God, emphasized another dimension in their descriptions of the function of Spirit baptism, regarding “endowment with power for service” as secondary to Spirit baptism’s primary purpose of bringing the believer into a new dimension of constant, conscious fellowship with Christ.²⁹

Pentecostal pastors today could be relieved of a lot of the stress and pressure they feel to live up to expectations by “doing” the work of the ministry. Pioneers in the Pentecostal movement, and Matta as well, would remind them that their identity is not in their ministry and service but in their relationship to Christ. Jesus said to his disciples after their return from successful ministry: “Do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven.”³⁰ An emphasis on being rather than doing would return the priority to spiritual transformation and Christlikeness and relieve the burden of “performance” that too many pastors are carrying.³¹ The result would be a renewed awareness of liberty and joy, much like Matta experienced in his early days as a monk, and as the early Pentecostals sang, “I’m free, free, gloriously

²⁹ Edith Blumhofer, *Pentecost in My Soul: Explorations in the Meaning of Pentecostal Experience in the Early Assemblies of God* (Springfield, MO: Gospel, 1989), 24. “People who held the conviction that what you were was more important than what you did nonetheless typically found themselves active in various forms of evangelism.” 23.

³⁰ Luke 10:20.

³¹ Chapter 3, footnote 26. The most pressing issues facing Christian leaders worldwide according to the Lausanne survey were “personal pride” followed by “a lack of integrity.”

free.”³² Such liberty and joy, rather than stress and discouragement, in the life of the Pentecostal pastor would be a significant attraction to church members who have yet to experience the baptism in the Holy Spirit and whose personal lives are also filled with stress and discouragement. Church members need to see their leaders model a Pentecostal lifestyle with an emphasis more on the fruit of the Spirit rather than the gifts of the Spirit. Both are important in the life of the church, but the character of the pastor reveals the authenticity or inauthenticity of the ministry. As the disciples of Matta at St. Macarius Monastery would say, “We need to live what we believe more than we need to change what we believe.”³³ Authentic Pentecostal pastors, filled with a contagious joy and a freedom from the cares of this world, who minister out of an overflow of spiritual power and anointing, will naturally attract others into the ministry as the Holy Spirit works through them. This will help replenish the ranks of younger ministers and will bring the median age of Assembly of God pastors back down to where it was thirty years ago.

B. Vocational Clarity

Clarity begins with a sense of calling and is heightened by each successive step taken in obedience to pursue and follow that calling. Matta possessed a definite clarity and certainty to his calling and demonstrated the qualities of perseverance and determination that led to fruitful and faithful ministry. Monastic life was his calling and he had a clear understanding and commitment to living life as a monk. Numerous opportunities were available for Matta to advance in the hierarchy of the institutional

³² Blumhofer, *Pentecost in My Soul*, 31.

³³ Abuna Wadeed, spiritual father of the novice monks at St. Macarius and a disciple of Matta El-Meskeen.

church and become a priest, bishop and even the Pope. These he refused throughout his life and continually resisted attempts to lure him away from monasticism. He discouraged his disciples from the priesthood as it was a step into the Church hierarchy and away from monasticism. One of the spiritual fathers at St. Macarius Monastery recalled Matta's last words to his disciples: "Stay away from women and priesthood."³⁴ The same clarity and certainty is needed for Pentecostal pastors today to overcome the many obstacles and temptations that attempt to lure, seduce, and discourage the contemporary minister. Matta's last words to Pentecostal pastors would be stated a bit differently but with the same meaning: "Stay away from anything that will lead you from your calling."

It is clear from the gospel accounts that Jesus possessed a definite clarity and certainty to his calling. He also faced temptations to alter course and expectations from others that were not in line with the Father's will. When they wanted to anoint Him as king, he withdrew and separated himself from the crowd. Popularity was not a goal and personal ambition was not the driving factor, hence his unusual response of withdrawal after the peoples' praise and adoration. These two—popularity and personal ambition fed by praise and adoration—are seductions that lead many ministers astray. "Go to your cell" is an admonition to remain in the place of your calling despite the urge to leave. The cell doesn't offer any exposure or opportunity for advancement. It offers the solitude where only God can see and where only the Father will reward. It's a reminder "to live

³⁴ Abuna Wadeed, spiritual father of the novice monks at St. Macarius and a disciple of Matta El-Meskeen.

life *coram deo* (before the heart of God) and thus to shift our awareness of audiences to the point where only ... God counts.”³⁵

Living before the Audience of One transforms all our endeavors ... the greatest deeds are done before the Audience of One, and that is enough ... We who live before the Audience of One can say to the world” “I have only one audience. Before you I have nothing to prove, nothing to gain, nothing to lose.”³⁶

One of the biggest challenges facing pastors today is accurately understanding and implementing pastoral ministry in a post-modern Western society. What is pastoral ministry and what should it look like in twenty-first century America. It is no longer the highly respected and honored profession that it was a century ago.³⁷ In the same way entering the monastic life was not respected or honored in Egypt when Matta became a monk in 1948. That changed within a decade, not because he sought honor or respectability, but because he lived the monastic life with authenticity and in obscurity. His goal was not monastic revival and growth but personal revival and his own spiritual growth. Such was the fervent desire of early Pentecostals who tarried for and sought after

³⁵ Os Guinness, *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 82.

³⁶ Guinness, *The Call*, 83.

³⁷ Clergy ranked eighth in a 2016 Gallup survey of most trusted professions in the United States. Jim Norman, “Americans Rate Healthcare Providers High on Honesty, Ethics,” *Gallup*, December 19, 2016, accessed February 18, 2018, http://news.gallup.com/poll/200057/americans-rate-healthcare-providers-high-honesty-ethics.aspx?g_source=Social%20Issues&g_medium=lead&g_campaign=tiles. Once considered the most honored profession in America, pastoral ministry in modern society is no longer ranked in the top ten of highly respected professions in the United States, whether measured by a 2016 Harris Poll study of most prestigious professions or a “top ten” list on a popular website. Niall McCarthy, “America’s Most Prestigious Professions in 2016,” *Forbes*, March 31, 2016, accessed February 18, 2018, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/niallmccarthy/2016/03/31/americas-most-prestigious-professions-in-2016-infographic/#7a2568591926>; Jon Skindzier, “Top 10: Most Respected Professions,” *AskMen*, accessed February 18, 2018, https://www.askmen.com/top_10/entertainment/top-10-most-respected-professions.html.

Spirit baptism, not for respectability and honor,³⁸ nor for church growth, but for personal holiness and spiritual transformation. Church growth for Pentecostals and monastic revival in Egypt were both a byproduct of an individual spiritual hunger and intense inner desire for communion with Christ. Matta would encourage Pentecostal pastors to prioritize their spiritual life and earnestly seek personal revival above all else. Jesus said in Matt 6:33, “Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

Matta El-Meskeen successfully practiced an ancient form of Christian spirituality and led a monastic community while embracing modern technology and education.³⁹ How was this done without changing the authentic nature of Coptic monasticism? This is the fundamental question for Pentecostal pastors leading congregations in a post-Christian society where cultural change is occurring rapidly and constantly. Unfortunately, the concept of pastoral ministry today has often been shaped more by passing fads and prevailing Western cultural models than by biblical truth and spiritual discernment. Church growth has become a major industry and all too often a primary

³⁸ Early Pentecostal leaders were shunned, ridiculed, and often ostracized. Their behavior and beliefs considered foolish and undignified. The unholy desire for dignity, honor and respectability oftentimes compromises the witness of Pentecostal leaders. Wagner, *Escape from Church, Inc.*, 184. “We’ve forgotten that part of a pastor’s glory is the willingness to suffer reproach—to be thought of as a fool—for the name of Christ.”

³⁹ Christiane Rathle, “The Desert Militants: Change and Modernizing Factors in Coptic Monasticism” (Master’s thesis, American University of Cairo, 1987), 65–66. The monastic ideals were not compromised by Matta and his disciples when combining ancient traditions with modern technology. “The spiritual father was able to find practical ways to accomplish the difficult balance and harmony between the basic principles of the monastic life, such as self-denial, abstinence and obedience, and the needs of a new generation of monks, brought up in age of technology ... Abuna Matta El-Meskeen gives the reason for economic growth in the Monastery to be the ideology ... as well as the acceptance of science as such, with its technology. He grants himself the credit of this equilibrium achieved between ideology and science—as would Weber’s charismatic prophet.”

objective for pastoral ministry. This has tended toward a misunderstanding of the nature of authentic biblical leadership and has misplaced the priorities within training institutions, colleges and seminaries. Priorities are also misplaced within congregations among lay-leaders who serve on church boards and committees. Certainly, the pastors themselves are the most vulnerable to these fads and the leadership models offered today that are more cultural than biblical. The numerous warnings, from Jesus in the gospels and later from the apostles in the epistles, to “beware of the leaven of the Pharisees” and to guard against the self-exaltation and self-promotion so prevalent within the Jewish religious institutions, should be a reminder to church leaders today of how subtle and sinister the deception can be. Peter’s hypocrisy in Galatians 2 highlights the vulnerability of even the most gifted and respected leader. Deception will characterize the last days, and American culture today is inundated with “fake news” and contradicting stories that are all presented as factual. How does one determine the authenticity and truthfulness of this flood of information presented through numerous and various media outlets today? Discernment as a personal quality developed through the spiritual disciplines and given as a gift of grace by the Holy Spirit is the highest priority and of greatest importance, in the pew, but more importantly, and especially, in the pulpit.

The greatest need in pastoral ministry today, according to Glenn Wagner, is a return to the metaphor and model of shepherding as presented in the Bible. Old Testament leaders, whether they be kings, prophets or priests, were all understood to function within this framework. Jesus declared himself to be the Good Shepherd and passed on this ministry to His disciples. Chapter three highlighted the biblical basis for

authentic leadership and demonstrated the shepherd model as that which was chosen by God to best represent His care and relationship with His people.

When God wanted to give His people a picture of the way he wanted them to relate to one another in community, he chose the metaphor of sheep and shepherd. He chose the shepherd, the human vocation that most closely parallels his own character and his own way of relating to his people.⁴⁰

Wagner identifies the “one problem underlying all others is that we have moved both pastors and churches from a community model to a corporation model.”⁴¹ He does not point the finger of fault at pastors, parishioners or church experts for this tragic move away from authentic biblical leadership. Often with pure motives and genuine sincerity, leaders have relied on a pragmatic approach rather than a biblical and theological approach. He mentions the shift away from pastoral theology to practical theology in seminaries at the turn of the century.

The schools believed they were sending their students out into the churches without sufficient instruction in the “nuts and bolts” of ministry—how to conduct weddings, funerals, counseling, and the like—so they began to change their curricula to focus on the practical aspects of ministry.⁴²

As a result of emphasizing skills and competencies, much of what is being taught to future pastors in seminaries is rooted more in psychological and sociological principles than in solid biblical theology. “Because the base was social science, not theology, the pastoral art was reduced to human skill.”⁴³ It’s no wonder then that spiritual disciplines

⁴⁰ Wagner, *Escape from Church, Inc.*, 29.

⁴¹ Wagner, *Escape from Church, Inc.*, 21.

⁴² Wagner, *Escape from Church, Inc.*, 57.

⁴³ Wagner, *Escape from Church, Inc.*, 60.

such as solitude, silence, prayer and fasting are neglected and “how to” books, seminars and conferences are well read and well attended by contemporary Christian ministers. The private prayer closet (the monk’s cell) has been replaced by the public forum where pragmatism has been promoted and personal spirituality and biblical theology has been neglected. Wagner emphasizes the need for every pastor to be a theologian.

If ministry belongs to God, then God should define what ministry looks like and what the role of pastor is to be. Anyone considering the pastoral ministry must start with the Word of God. Our philosophy of ministry must be founded on a biblical theology. Unless we build out of the Scriptures our theology of what it means to be a pastor, we’ll miss the whole thing.⁴⁴

Matta’s desire at the beginning of monasticism was, much like the apostles in Acts 6, to commit himself to the Word of God and prayer. His numerous books and commentaries are a testimony to his faithfulness in keeping that early commitment throughout his vocation. His disciples also testify to the priority of prayer and Bible study that Matta both practiced and encouraged his followers to embrace as well. Matta was a theologian and his writings displayed a depth of knowledge and understanding that included the Scriptures, the patristic writings and the writings of contemporary theologians.⁴⁵ He was open to many different theological perspectives but always anchored to the Bible. “Never since the days of Athanasius and Cyril the Great has Egypt

⁴⁴ Wagner, *Escape from Church, Inc.*, 67.

⁴⁵ Fouad Youssef, “The Concept of Freedom in God According to Father Matta El-Meskeen,” *The Word of Life* 10, no. 4 (Fall 2016): 172; Anthony O’Mahony, “Tradition at the Heart of Renewal: The Coptic Orthodox Church and Monasticism in Modern Egypt,” *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 7, no. 3 (2007): 72. “In contrast to much earlier Coptic theological literature, they [the writings of Matta] are well based on solid studies of the patristic literature and show a growing knowledge of and critical discussion with Western theological research.”

had a significant theological movement. But now in the ecumenical person of Father Matta El-Meskeen a revival is underway.”⁴⁶ Matta would encourage contemporary Pentecostal pastors to combine their spirituality and experience with a sound biblical theology, both of which need to be developed and sustained by vigorous and diligent Bible study. Pentecostal pastors should function as prophetic theologians, discerning the times and applying the scriptures accordingly. Early Pentecostal leaders would be described as such; they understood the eschatological importance of their Spirit baptism experience and tied this to the latter rain and end-times harvest. Experience and theology combined to provide the impetus and motivation for a great spiritual movement. This movement today can only be sustained as Pentecostal pastors maintain clarity in their vocation, and understand and embrace this core value, in the words of the prophet Zechariah, “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit says the Lord of hosts.”⁴⁷

Contemporary pastors in the US described their two greatest challenges as (1) recruiting volunteers, and (2) leading their people through change.⁴⁸ These two challenges were minimal or non-existent in both the monastic renewal in Egypt and the Pentecostal revival in America.⁴⁹ Priorities were rearranged, perspectives clarified and

⁴⁶ Farouk T. K. Boctor, “Union with Christ in the Work of Matta El-Meskeen” (ThM thesis, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1995), iii.

⁴⁷ Zechariah 4:6.

⁴⁸ Krejcir, “Research Statistics on Pastors.” When asked, “What are the biggest challenges pastors face in their church,” 24 percent indicated “recruiting volunteers” and 21.4 percent indicated “leading their people through change”—“(this includes apathy, fighting dead traditions and members focusing on the wrong or meaningless things).”

⁴⁹ That is not to say that people outside of these two movements were not resistant to change. Certainly, many denominations and organizations in the US and the Coptic Church in Egypt resisted these two respective movements.

people willingly offered themselves for service when the Spirit was moving, calling and bringing revival and renewal. An interesting contrast was mentioned in Chapter 4 between the Sunday School movement in Egypt and Nasser's revolution in 1952. Nasser's social revolution failed in large part for lack of willing volunteers. The government had to rely on "a coercive machinery" to get people to comply and assist with implementing the many state projects intended to change Egyptian society. The Sunday School movement, on the other hand, had an army of willing volunteers, lay-people who were committed to seeing change and renewal within the Coptic Church. The government focused on changing the institutions, while the Sunday School movement focused on "changing the people first and then the institution."⁵⁰ This historical example highlights Quinn's theory of how change can occur within an institution or organization; the leader must first experience deep change, followed by the people, and finally the institution. The shortage of volunteers in churches and the decrease in number of younger ministers in the Assemblies of God may indicate a reliance more on Nasser's approach than the Sunday School movement (top-down rather than grass-roots). It also may indicate that spiritual transformation has not occurred and revival and renewal are not present. Both Matta and early Pentecostals had an anti-institutional (denominational) inclination and tendency, and both appealed to the lay-people within the church, producing great enthusiasm and zeal for sacrifice and service. In both instances spiritual renewal and transformation occurred within the individual first and then spread to others.

⁵⁰ S. S. Hassan, *Christian Versus Muslim in Modern Egypt: The Century-Long Struggle for Coptic Equality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 83.

Both the transformational and authentic leadership theories rely on trust and loyalty between the leader and follower. They go beyond simply maintaining good relationships to inspiring and motivating followers to accomplish more than what was originally expected or needed.⁵¹ The importance of vocational clarity and understanding the pastoral role from a biblical rather than cultural perspective is highlighted again by Wagner who contrasts leadership and shepherding.

In the leadership model, the goal is to mobilize and move people to our vision. But the first thing pastors need to do is to spend time letting our people see our shepherd's heart, allowing them to get to know us and see us in action among them. My first responsibility as pastor is to build my credibility as a faithful shepherd, not to convince people to buy into my vision for the church. The shepherd builds a relationship of trust with the flock. ... A leader's effectiveness is built on vision, not trust or character. Shepherding is just the opposite. Shepherding is built on character growing out of earned trust. That means *the number one goal for a pastor is not to articulate a great vision but to help his sheep trust him and know him.*⁵²

Matta El-Meskeen's success at St. Macarius Monastery was not because of great vision and ability to articulate and implement great plans and projects. Christiane Rathle studied the economic success at the monastery and contributed it to ideology and charismatic leadership. "Their religious ideology is said to center around the theme of "death to self." This obviously channels their ambition towards the community benefit and not towards personal gain."⁵³ Matta was a living example of "death to self" and

⁵¹ Chapter 2, footnotes 16 and 17.

⁵² Wagner, *Escape from Church, Inc.*, 147.

⁵³ Rathle, "Desert Militants," 61. "In the case of the group of militant monks, led by their charismatic leader ... the spirit behind this economic activity is characterized by great energy and initiative on the part of the group." 49.

inspired others to follow his example.⁵⁴ He had built his credibility and trust with his followers over years of consistent monastic living. He would not consider himself a “leader” or “charismatic,” but rather a spiritual father simply responsible to pass on what he had learned. The group of monks around Matta were able to accomplish much more than ever expected⁵⁵ because of their deep loyalty to their spiritual father, their love for one another, their trust in God and commitment to follow Christ. The testimony of President Anwar Sadat upon visiting the monastery in the 1970s sums up their accomplishments: “The state with all its capabilities could not have done what you have done for your monastery and your country.”⁵⁶

Humility is a characteristic repeated frequently in chapter three to identify authentic biblical leadership. The number one problem identified by the Lausanne survey was “personal pride” among Christian leaders.⁵⁷ Since “God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble” and looks to those “who are humble and contrite of spirit,” humility is like discernment; an indispensable characteristic for the Pentecostal pastor. Both of these qualities are produced by the spiritual disciplines.⁵⁸ The article in *The Pentecostal Evangel* in 1929 titled “The Secret of Successful Ministry” mentioned that “solitude is

⁵⁴ Rathle, “Desert Militants,” 78. “When told that many university graduates follow his example, he refused to acknowledge the responsibility of being the cause for the influx of those graduates.”

⁵⁵ Rathle, “Desert Militants,” 9. The growth of the monastery provided benefits to monks themselves, the Coptic Church, the surrounding villages and towns, and the country of Egypt.

⁵⁶ Chapter 5, note 96.

⁵⁷ See footnote 31.

⁵⁸ Chapter 2, 48.

necessary for humility, discernment, and empowerment before service and ministry can begin.”⁵⁹ As Wagner says, “The shepherd’s work is a humble work. . . . A man must come down to it. A shepherd cannot shine. He cannot cut a figure. His work must be done in obscurity.”⁶⁰ Work done in obscurity, encouraged by Jesus in Matthew 6, was a core value of desert monasticism and the primary reason why the monks avoided positions of authority and titles of respect. It is the reason why Matta retreated to his cave when positions within the Coptic Church were offered. Humility was at stake and the sin of pride and selfish ambition always lurking and waiting for an opportunity to spoil and corrupt the work of God. John Stott wrote, “Pride is the chief occupational hazard of the preacher” and quoted Richard Baxter who exclaimed, “O what a constant companion, what a tyrannical commander, what a sly, subtle and insinuating enemy is this sin pride!”⁶¹ Charles Spurgeon, in his 1858 “Lecture on Little Faith,” highlighted the necessity of laboring “to get as much as possible free from self.” This necessitated an attitude of indifference to both praise and criticism from others to avoid pride in the pulpit.

He learned therefore to try to regard both man’s praise and censure as unworthy of notice, “but to fix my heart simply on this—I know that I have right motive in what I attempt to do, I am conscious that I endeavored to serve God with a single eye to His glory, and therefore it is not for me to take praise from man or censure, but to stand independently upon the rock of right doing.”⁶²

⁵⁹ Chapter 2, footnote 130.

⁶⁰ Wagner, *Escape from Church, Inc.*, 245.

⁶¹ John Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 320–21.

⁶² Chad Williams, “Spurgeon on Pride in the Pulpit,” *Greater Atlanta Baptist Network*, June 23, 2014, accessed November 10, 2017, <http://www.gabnetwork.org/spurgeon-on-pride-in-the-pulpit/>. Taken

The same caution and concern should characterize contemporary Pentecostal pastors, not a false sense of humility but a vocational clarity and commitment to “serve the flock” and to guard one’s heart from arrogance, selfish ambition and personal promotion and exaltation. Obscurity in the ministry is very difficult to manage in the contemporary climate where social media provides instant and constant exposure before a wide audience. This observation, made in 1929 in *The Pentecostal Evangel*, is much more relevant for Christian ministers today.

Pride and selfishness are stalking through the land in these days like two great devouring monsters ... and nowhere is this more pronounced than in the religious world ... Seldom do we see humility manifested in its entirety. Even professing Christians, who ought to be humble like their Master, greatly lack this virtue ... because of this lack of humility, God is leaving the world to itself, to carry out its own ideas, plans and programs. This is also true of the modern churches ... this is the day of man worship, and the human is very much in control ... Especially is this true of those who are leaders, preachers and teachers; and for those who have been prospered and have gained for themselves a reputation in religious work.⁶³

Advice given by Assembly of God pastor and Superintendent of the Hungarian Assemblies of God in the US, Joseph Wannemacher, in 1943 may sound strange to Pentecostal pastors and leaders today, but his words echo the spirit of the desert fathers and could easily come from the lips of Matta El-Meskeen.

from Tom J. Nettles’s work on the life of Spurgeon, *Living by Revealed Truth: The Life and Pastoral Theology of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* (Ross-shire: Mentor, 2013). This is very similar to the desert advice given by St. Macarius to a novice monk who wanted to be holy. He was told to go to the cemetery and praise the dead, which he did obediently and returned to his spiritual father who asked him, “What did they say?” “Nothing,” replied the monk. He was then told to go back to the cemetery and insult the dead. After doing this and returning, the spiritual father asked him again, “What did they say?” Again he replied, “Nothing.” The advice was then given, “If you want to be holy, be like the dead, taking no account of either the scorn of men or their praises.” Taken from the *Apophthegmata*. Belden Lane, *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes: Exploring Desert and Mountain Spirituality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 182.

⁶³ Albert Weaver, “Pride,” *The Pentecostal Evangel*, July 13, 1929, 1-3.

You ought to appear in your own eyes very small. Frequently ponder your weakness, your spiritual blindness, your lowness, your hardheartedness, your inconsistency, your insensibility towards God, your attachment to creatures, and upon the host of other vicious inclinations that spring from your corrupt nature. Let this be to you a strong motive for continually diving deeper into your own nothingness, and for always appearing utterly small and vile in your own eyes. Meditate upon these words that you may the more readily become humble, for “He giveth grace to the humble.”⁶⁴

Consider the spirit of early Pentecostals, like William Seymour at Azusa Street, who used to sit on the platform behind two shoe boxes, putting his head in one, and sometimes praying the entire service in this position. “Pride and self-assertion, self-importance and self-esteem could not survive there.”⁶⁵ The editors of the early *Latter Rain Evangel* refused to put their names on the masthead for fear of self-promotion and pride. Today, however, television, print, and social media have encouraged a celebrity culture in Christian ministry where self-promotion seemingly becomes a necessary part of ministry. The deception is subtle and discernment is necessary. Pride is compared to the current in the ocean and the pull is always present in the human heart.

When you stand in the water at the beach, you feel the persistent pull of the current ... to deny it or minimize it will result in potential bodily harm. Such is the case with pride. It is dangerous and persistent ... so before you

⁶⁴ Joseph Wannemacher, “The Pride of Being Something: Though I Be Nothing,” *The Pentecostal Evangel*, April 10, 1943, 4–5. In a similar article later that year, Wannemacher quoted from Teresa of Avila, Madam Chantal and Francis of Assisi, comparing their statements with Paul in 2 Cor 12:11, warning of the sin of pride in spiritual work and the need to “watch” in order to discern. “The great saints of the ages fled from honors, and took more pains to escape them than the ambitious do to secure the highest honors ... the great saints have all held dignities, praises and honors in abhorrence.” He goes on to highlight the Parable of the Pharisee and Publican, warning of ‘pharisaical holiness’ and high opinions of personal works and good deeds. “Let us therefore tremble, when we feel arising within us an ambition to appear in public, and to be esteemed of the world. And when the world pays us some tribute of honor, let us beware of taking complacency in it, as it might prove the cause of utter ruin.” Joseph Wannemacher, “The Pride of Ambition,” *The Pentecostal Evangel*, July 31, 1943, 5.

⁶⁵ Frank Bartleman, “Day 90: William J. Seymour,” *The Call*, March 30, 2016, accessed November 10, 2017, www.thecall.com/article/day-90-william-j-seymour. This excerpt was taken from Frank Bartleman’s *How Pentecost Came to Los Angeles*, 1925.

categorically deny pride in the ministry, please remember that you are standing in the water. And as sure as there is a current in the sea, there is pride in you. You want approval and honor just like anyone else. Admit it and get to work on it.⁶⁶

Getting to work on it involves spiritual disciplines practiced in the presence of God, not before others, and allowing the Holy Spirit to illuminate and provide discernment. This will enhance vocational clarity and give a clearer understanding of the biblical role of shepherding which encourages humility rather than pride. “In the social structure of the ancient world, shepherds were pretty much the lowest of the low.”⁶⁷

God calls pastors to be shepherds. It is not an option, not an entry-level position for career development. It is the defined role that will enable a person of God to develop a heart for God, to learn to experience the power and provision of God, and to properly love and care for the sheep. But it’s hard. It goes against the flesh. It requires resolute focus and commitment. It is the path least traveled, but it is the path dictated by God.⁶⁸

Pentecostal pastors will have to decide which path the movement will travel in the twenty-first century; whether personal experience will align with core values and beliefs, or whether core values and beliefs will be changed to align with personal experience.

He offers a model of spirituality and authenticity for Pentecostal leaders and highlights the importance of spiritual insight, or discernment, attained not through action and study but “attained by silence, retreat and long prayers in their various stages.” Matta changed the future of the Coptic Church by looking to the past and rediscovering the rich spiritual heritage that had been buried and all but forgotten. He then combined this

⁶⁶ Erik Raymond, “Pastors, Platforms and Pride,” *The Gospel Coalition*, May 4, 2016, accessed November 10, 2017, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/erik-raymond/pastors-platforms-and-pride/>.

⁶⁷ Wagner, *Escape from Church, Inc.*, 103.

⁶⁸ Wagner, *Escape from Church, Inc.*, 245.

historical treasure with modern technology and education. A similar approach will insure the Assemblies of God as a movement in the twenty-first century remains authentically Pentecostal and true to core values and beliefs. The first step would be, not simply rediscovering our history, but re-appropriating the spirit of Pentecostal pioneers who themselves changed the future by looking to the past. Bill Easum echoed this same sentiment when referring to his denomination and the drift that has occurred over the past one hundred years. He remembered the pioneers of his movement, “the circuit riders,” and mentioned that the future “lies in going back to the roots” (chapter 1, note 10).

Oral histories are a dying art, which is sad indeed, for they show appropriate respect for the lives and experiences of those who have come before ... Unfortunately we live in a time now where everyone seems to be solely looking ahead, as though we deem nothing in the past worthy of our attention. The future is always fresh and exciting ... Yet it may well be that our greatest wealth as human beings can be “discovered” by simply looking behind us.⁶⁹

As Pentecostals look to their past and to the pioneers who birthed the Assemblies of God movement, the inevitable discovery will be that the roots are much deeper and the history much longer than one hundred years. The path goes much further back than the early twentieth century, which is why the similarities exist between Pentecostals and the desert fathers. Matta’s experience in many ways mirrors the experience of the three hundred gathered in Hot Springs, Arkansas. Deep devotion to Christ and a radical dependence on God through the ministry of the Holy Spirit was their shared experience. Both were anti-institutional and reform-minded with a deep desire to restore the glory of the early Christian community. As pioneers and reformers they experienced persecution

⁶⁹ David Baldacci, *Wish You Well* (New York: Warner, 2000), viii.

and frequent conflict, oftentimes from the institutional church hierarchy. Priority was placed on the Word of God as a personal message for individual transformation and restoration. Prayer was a way of life and an opportunity to experience the immanence of God and receive power for daily living. Ascetic disciplines such as fasting, night vigils, solitude and silence, poverty and celibacy were practiced for spiritual growth and not for personal salvation and merit. Renunciation of privilege, position, earthly power, and the pursuit of anything considered worldly and temporal was fervently practiced and encouraged. Purity, charity and humility were the desired results and characteristics of the spirit-filled life. These characteristics formed through spiritual disciplines enabled Matta and early Pentecostal pioneers to effect significant change and improvement, not from the outside in but from the inside out. Both Quinn and Covey highlight the ability of the individual to transform organizations and institutions, even society, by first experiencing an inner transformation. Experts are not needed in spiritual leadership, according to Easum, but instead interpreters who possess discernment and can help others navigate their journey of faith. Action and study produce experts while the spiritual disciplines of silence, solitude and extended seasons of prayer, through God's grace and indwelling Spirit, produce spiritual directors, or "spiritual fathers." Matta El-Meskeen did not diminish the importance of intellectual pursuit and study. His library and the hours spent reading and writing testify to the importance he placed on disciplined study. The depth of his writings demonstrate a sharp mind and keen intellect. He recognized, however, much like our Pentecostal pioneers, that knowledge and intellect by themselves were insufficient to affect spiritual growth and train for leadership. His expertise was not in writing, or in leading, or in building a great monastery; Matta El-Meskeen became an

expert in prayer and devotion to Christ. Prayer was his life and Christ was his love, and everything else was simply the fruit of that relationship. Those gathered in Hot Springs, Arkansas in 1914 can best be described in the same way; they had a deep love for Christ and fervency in prayer and everything that followed was simply the fruit of that relationship.

Pentecostals have much easier access to their heritage and to their “spiritual fathers and mothers” than Matta had in the mid-1940s. Years of language study and translation were required to rediscover the treasures of early Egyptian Christianity and the patristic writings. Their influence on Matta’s life cannot be minimized. They became heroes to Matta and eventually to the contemporary Coptic Church and their lives modeled and imitated by others. As a greater number of Assembly of God adherents lack the experience of the baptism in the Holy Spirit, it may be their lack of desire and experience is a result of leadership that has not modeled an authentic spirit-filled life. Many in leadership likewise are without an example to follow; without a spiritual father who can say, “Imitate me as I imitate Christ.” Without a model to follow we are left without a path to travel. The Eastern Orthodox Church has their saints to celebrate and a calendar throughout the year to remind the faithful of these heroes of the past. Matta also had a handful of “heroes” in his day who were practicing authentic monasticism in the tradition of the desert fathers, and he sought these men out for guidance and help.⁷⁰ The contemporary Pentecostal church, both leaders and members, need heroes to imitate and examples to follow. A semester class on history and polity is not enough for Pentecostal

⁷⁰ These would include Abuna Abdel Mesih El Habashi and Father Mikhael Zerbawy.

leaders to “reappropriate the spirit” of these Pentecostal pioneers. The Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center offers a treasure of digitalized and archived testimonies and writings of Pentecostals from the early twentieth century. These could serve in a similar fashion to the treasure Matta received upon entering St. Samuel Monastery. The further we move chronologically from our founding fathers and mothers, the more necessary these archived testimonies and articles become in order to insure contemporary Pentecostal leadership remains faithful to true-north principles ... not simply in letter, but in spirit. Though the context is different, the importance of knowing church history and looking back to maintain true-north principles is highlighted by Stephen Nichols of Ligonier Ministries.

For Nichols, one way forward in understanding God and ourselves is to consult the historic church. “While slightly over half see value in church history, [nearly] 70 percent have no place for creeds in their personal discipleship,” he said. For Nichols, the church’s knowledge of its past will determine its future. Knowing heresies and how they were overcome, he says, will help the church stay on the right track theologically.⁷¹

The “right track,” the “sure path,” and the “ancient way” all describe the primary purpose of spiritual leadership, whether in the deserts of Egypt or the urban centers of modern America. The biblical record along with numerous examples in Church history point to the human tendency toward self-deception; we so easily lose our way and get off track and our compass gradually drifts away from true-north principles. Fortunately the Bible and Church history are also filled with individuals who possess discernment and rediscover the “sure path.” The life of Matta El-Meskeen is one such example that speaks

⁷¹ Kevin Emmert, “New Poll Finds Evangelicals’ Favorite Heresies,” *Christianity Today*, October 28, 2014, accessed October 22, 2017, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2014/october-web-only/new-poll-finds-evangelicals-favorite-heresies.html?start=1>.

today, not only to the Coptic Church in Egypt, but to the Pentecostal Church in America and to churches around the world. He is like a modern-day voice crying in the wilderness, “Prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight.”

III. Critical Review

The practical concerns related to the availability of English sources proved to be unwarranted. The numerous additional sources in Arabic—audio recordings, interviews, articles and books—certainly would have enhanced the research, but the material in English was sufficient. The biography of Matta El-Meskeen, though fully translated into English, has not yet been published as of May 2017. I was fortunate to have access to the first seventeen chapters in English for this project. The remaining twelve chapters would be of great benefit and shed considerably more light on Matta’s leadership at St. Macarius in the latter years of his life. My time spent at the monastery included four visits over a three-year period. The last visit, a one-week stay beginning on May 9, 2017, was the most beneficial. Informal interviews and conversations with some of the monks during this time helped to better understand the leadership style of Matta and his influence today on young Coptic Christians. Further conversations and more formal interviews would be helpful in determining Matta’s continued impact on the Coptic Church ten years after his death.

Extended research in the future would be helpful to determine the extent to which Pentecostal leaders and Assembly of God pastors today are familiar with the early pioneers of the movement. A questionnaire could be developed for both Assembly of God pastors and Assembly of God church members and adherents to determine the level of familiarity and knowledge that exists today with those who contributed significantly to

the Pentecostal movement in the early years. Also, looking at the lives of some of these early pioneers through the lens of authentic leadership and using the different components of the authentic leadership model would be an interesting study. In my research on the lives of early Pentecostal leaders, I was surprised to see that nearly all had a series of crisis experiences—trigger events—that led them to a Pentecostal experience and renewal theology. Multiple deaths in the family, near-death experiences, critical health issues, drug addiction and severe depression are some examples of what led many of these pioneers to a deeper spiritual experience.

The spiritual disciplines that were a regular part of Matta's monastic life were familiar to early Pentecostal pioneers. Further research could be done to determine how these disciplines are being practiced by Pentecostals today and to what extent they are being taught in our Bible colleges and seminaries. The current interest in monasticism and communal living in evangelical churches is indicative of a growing desire and hunger for a more authentic Christian experience among believers today. *The Benedict Option*⁷² is one example of this interest and desire being expressed in a post-modern culture to rediscover authentic ways to experience Christian community. Further research could be done on current efforts within the Pentecostal Church and among Pentecostal believers to rediscover our heritage and the spiritual connection to the desert fathers. Peter Haldorf, “the Pentecostal monk” in Sweden, has enthusiastically embraced the desert fathers and considers this movement as an authentic part of his spiritual heritage. Peter attended the

⁷² Rod Dreher's *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Sentinel, 2017) “calls on American Christians to prepare for the coming Dark Age by embracing an ancient Christian way of life. He argues that the way forward is actually the way back—all the way to St. Benedict of Nursia.”

ten-year commemoration of the life of Matta El-Meskeen at the Monastery of Bose in Italy in May 2016 and contributed an article entitled, “A Reading of Matta El-Meskeen” in *The Word of Life* magazine. The article dealt with ecumenism and Christian unity, a significant subject in Matta’s writings and something dear to his heart. Further research and study on ecumenical efforts like this where the emphasis is more on spirituality and Christian love rather than denominational and organizational agreement would be beneficial to the Church’s witness worldwide. It has been my hope in conducting this research and introducing Matta El-Meskeen to my own Pentecostal constituency that a greater awareness will develop to our common spiritual heritage and a greater appreciation will be expressed for the contribution of the Eastern Church and their witness for Christ as a persecuted minority.

Where do we begin, with the letter or with the Spirit? With the law or with life? With the words of our dogma or with its inner essence? We should be clear of one thing: If we begin with the letter, we will kill the spirit ... We must begin by living together in the one and inner essence of faith, before we can agree on its content.⁷³

⁷³ Matta quoted in an article by Peter Haldorf on Christian unity: “A Reading of Matta El-Meskeen,” *The Word of Life* 10, no. 4 (Fall 2016): 179.

APPENDIX:
LIBRARY OF FATHER MATTHEW THE POOR

The following list was compiled and given by Abuna Wadeed, one of the disciples of Matta El-Meskeen and currently the spiritual father of novice monks at St. Macarius Monastery. Abuna Wadeed serves in the monastery library where the library of Matta El-Meskeen has recently been added.

Summary	Vol Nr	Bib Nr	Barcode, Location and Classification
Contemplative Prayer, 1st ed., 1971, Merton, Thomas - Image Books, Garden City, New York - 116 p.; ISBN = 0385092199		21	5703 - 59D - Spirituality 149 - 59D - Spirituality 148 - 59D - Spirituality 23 - 59D - Spirituality
Russian Letters of Spiritual Direction: 1834-1860, 2nd ed., 1975, Macarius, Starets of Optino - Iulia De Beauscobre, Ed - St Vladimir's Seminary Press - 115 p.; ISBN = 0913836230		41	5692 - 52D - Monasticism 537 - 52D - Monasticism 45 - 52D - Monasticism
On the Invocation of the Name of Jesus, 1st ed., 1949, Gillet, Lev - The Fellowship of St Alban & St Sergius - 32 p.		43	5769 - 7D - Spirituality 2914 - 52D - Spirituality 184 - 52D - Spirituality 48 - 66C - Spirituality 47 - 52D - Spirituality
Liturgical Piety, 1st ed., 1966, Bouyer, Louis - University of Notre Dam Press, Notre Dam, Indiana - 284 p.; ISBN = 5411103		54	5602 - 58C - Liturgy & Liturgical Texts 60 - 58C - Liturgy & Liturgical Texts
Worship in the New Testament, Vol. 9, 4th ed., 1967, Moule, C F D - John Knox Press, Atlanta - 87 p.; Ecumenical Studies in Worship; ISBN = 627174	9	55	5621 - 57B - Liturgy & Liturgical Texts 61 - 58C - Liturgy & Liturgical Texts
The Way of Perfection, 1st ed., 1964, Teresa of Avila, St - Image Books, Garden City, New York - 280 p.; ISBN = 0385065396		163	5780 - 59C - Spirituality 181 - 59C - Spirituality
The Coptic Liturgy, 1st ed., 1963, Basil the Great, St - Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate, Cairo - 117 p.		248	5581 - 68A - Liturgy & Liturgical Texts

			281 - 68A - Liturgy & Liturgical Texts 269 - 68A - Liturgy & Liturgical Texts
Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ: Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology, 1st ed., 1994, Green, Joel B, Ed - Eerdmans Publishing Company - 536 p.; ISBN = 0853645604		279	4965 - 4B - Bible & Biblical Studies 307 - 5B - Bible & Biblical Studies
The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community, 1st ed., 1993, Gould, Graham - Clarendon Press Oxford - 202 p.; Oxford Early Christian Studies; ISBN = 0198263457		312	5271 - 53D - Monasticism 351 - 54D - Monasticism
1&2 Thessalonians, Vol. 45, 1st ed., 1982, Bruce, Frederick Fyvie - Word Books, Publisher - 228 p.; Word Biblical Commentary; ISBN = 0849902444	45	510	4418 - 27D - Bible & Biblical Studies 4375 - 27D - Bible & Biblical Studies 565 - 27D - Bible & Biblical Studies
Introduction to Eastern Patristic Thought and Orthodox Theology, Vol. 30, 1st ed., 1991, Tsirpanlis, Constantine N - A Michael Glazier Book: the Liturgical Press, Collegville - 277 p.; Theology and Life Series; ISBN = 0814658016	30	519	5286 - 20B - Patrology & Patristic Texts 574 - 20B - Patrology & Patristic Texts
Saint Paul's Epistle to the Philippians, 4th ed., 1965, Lightfoot, J B - Zondervan Publishing House - 350 p.; Classic Commentary Library		746	3218 - 28C - Bible & Biblical Studies 811 - 28C - Bible & Biblical Studies
The Face of Christ in the Old Testament, 1st ed., 1974, Barrois, Georges - St Vladimir's Seminary Press - 172 p.; ISBN = 0913836133		800	4937 - 3D - Bible & Biblical Studies 4480 - 3D - Bible & Biblical Studies 879 - 3D - Bible & Biblical Studies 869 - 3D - Bible & Biblical Studies
The Lives of the Desert Fathers, the Historia Monachorum in Aegypto, 1st ed., 1980, Ward, Benedicta - Norman Russell - Mowbray London & Oxford - 181 p.; ISBN = 0264665813		823	5285 - 53C On Loan to 131 907 - 53C On Loan to 118 906 - 53C - Monasticism 905 - 53C On Loan to 126

			894 - 53C - Monasticism
Writings From the Philokalia on the Prayer of the Heart, 4th ed., 1951, Philokalia - E. Kadloubovsky & Palmer - 1962 - Faber and Faber Limited, 24 Russell Square, London - 420 p.		850	5270 - 53D - Monasticism 928 - 53D - Monasticism 929 - 53D - Monasticism
The Call of the Desert: the Solitary Life in the Christian Church, 1st ed., 1964, Anson, Peter F - Spck, London - 278 p.		876	5293 - 53D - Monasticism 965 - 54C - Monasticism
Monastic Studies 13, Vol. 13, 1st ed., 1982, Freeman, Laurence - Mount Savior Monastery, Pine City - 261 p.; ISBN = 0919815014	13	893	5300 - 54D - Periodicals 983 - 54B - Periodicals
The Letter of Paul to the Romans, 2nd ed., 1967, Best, Ernest - Cambridge University Press, London - 184 p.; the Cambridge Bible Commentary		908	5127 - 27A - Bible & Biblical Studies 998 - 27A - Bible & Biblical Studies
Christianity Among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times, 1st ed., 1979, Trimmingham, J. Spencer - Longmans, Green and Co. London - 342 p.; ISBN = 0582780810		924	5411 - 23D - History & Geography 1018 - 23D - History & Geography
Christianity, Judaism and Other Greco-Roman Cults, Part 4, Judaism After 70, 1st ed., 1975, - Jacob Neusner - Leiden, E. J. Brill - 241 p.; ISBN = 9004042172		928	5415 - 23C - History & Geography 1022 - 23C - History & Geography
Saints of the East, 1st ed., 1963, Attwater, Donald - Harvill Press, London - 190 p.		957	5464 - 56C - Hagiography 1053 - 56C - Hagiography 1052 - 56C - Hagiography
The Chosen Twelve, 1st ed., 1983, Hanna, Sami R - A Research Publication - 60 p.		970	5468 - 56B - Hagiography 1068 - 56C - Hagiography
The Christian East, the Eastern Orthodox Church and Indian Christianity, 1st ed., 1956, Zernov, Nicolas - Spck, London - 138 p.		979	5446 - 23D - History & Geography 1077 - 52D - History & Geography
The Passion of Christ, 1st ed., 1965, Kesich, Veselin - St Vladimir's Seminary Press - 84 p.		987	5768 - 7D - Theology 1090 - 52D - Theology 1089 - 52D - Theology 1088 - 52D - Theology

Creation and Redemption: Vol 3, Vol. 3, 1st ed., 1976, Florovsky, Georges - Nordland Publishing Co, Belmont - 317 p.; the Collected Works of Georges Florovsky; ISBN = 913124109	3	1012	5932 - 52B - Theology 1120 - 52B On Loan to 81 until 01/01/2012
Christ in Eastern Christian Thought, 1st ed., 1975, Meyendorff, Jean - St Vladimir's Seminary Press - 248 p.; ISBN = 0913836273		1030	5018 - 4C - Theology 1147 - 10D - Theology 7313 - 10D - Theology
A Short Life of Jesus, 2nd ed., 1986, Harrison, Everett F - Eerdmans Publishing Company - 288 p.; ISBN = 0802818242		1032	5023 - 4C - Bible & Biblical Studies 1149 - 5B - Bible & Biblical Studies 6672 - 5B - Bible & Biblical Studies
The Meaning of Tradition, 1st ed., 1964, Congar, Yves - Hawthorn Books, New York - 155 p.		1044	5348 - 11B - Theology 1161 - 11B - Theology
St Athanasius on the Incarnation, 1st ed., 1953, Athanasius, St - C. S. Lewis - St Vladimir's Seminary Press - 120 p.		1116	5308 - 19C On Loan to 110 1241 - 19C - Patrology & Patristic Texts
Life-Giving Blessing: An Inquiry Into the Eucharistic Doctrine of Cyril of Alexandria, Vol. 17, 1st ed., 1977, Gebremedhin, Ezra - Uppsala University Press - 124 p.; Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis; ISBN = 9155406904	17	1123	5588 - 19C On Loan to 144 1249 - 19C - Patrology & Patristic Texts
Christian Egypt Ancient and Modern, 2nd ed., 1977, Meinardus, Otto - the American University in Cairo Press - 708 p.		1225	5401 - 72B - History & Geography 1373 - 70D - History & Geography 1372 - 72B - History & Geography
Christian Egypt Faith and Life, 1st ed., 1970, Meinardus, Otto - the American University in Cairo Press - 513 p.		1226	5417 - 71B - History & Geography 1374 - 72B - History & Geography
Eyewitness to Jesus, Amazing New Manuscript Evidence About the Origin of the Gospels, 1st ed., 1996, Thiede, Carsten Peter - Doubleday & Company, Inc. - 206 p.; ISBN = 0385480512		1253	4684 - 5C - Bible & Biblical Studies 1401 - 52C On Loan to 13
New Testament Illustrations, 1st ed., 1966, Jones, Clifford M, Ed - Cambridge		1268	4701 - 27A - Bible & Biblical Studies

University Press, London - 189 p.; the Cambridge Bible Commentary			4700 - 27A - Bible & Biblical Studies 3758 - 27A - Bible & Biblical Studies 3757 - 27A - Bible & Biblical Studies 3756 - 27A On Loan to 113 3755 - 27A - Bible & Biblical Studies 3754 - 27A - Bible & Biblical Studies 3753 - 27A - Bible & Biblical Studies 1417 - 27A - Bible & Biblical Studies
Introduction to Liturgical Theology, 2nd ed., 1970, Schmemmann, Alexander - the Faith Press, Svs, New York - 170 p.		1270	5600 - 57B - Liturgy & Liturgical Texts 1422 - 58C - Liturgy & Liturgical Texts
The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Vol. 2, Vol. 2, 1st ed., 1962, Buttrick, George Atther - Abingdon Press, Nashville - 1030 p.; Interpreter's Bible; ISBN = 0687192714	2	1275	5808 - 31B - Bible & Biblical Studies 2811 - 31B - Bible & Biblical Studies 1427 - 31B - Bible & Biblical Studies
The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Vol. 4, Vol. 4, 1st ed., 1962, Buttrick, George Atther - Abingdon Press, Nashville - 964 p.; Interpreter's Bible; ISBN = 0687192706	4	1277	5810 - 31B - Bible & Biblical Studies 2813 - 31B - Bible & Biblical Studies 1429 - 31B - Bible & Biblical Studies
Philocalie Des Peres Neptiques (Hesychius De Batos, Jean Carpathios), Vol. 3, 1st ed., 1981, Hesychius De Batos, Jean Carpathios - Jacques Touraille - Abbaye De Bellefontaine - 145 p.; Philocalie Des Peres Neptiques; ISBN = 2855899532	3	1834	5287 - 55A - Monasticism 1999 - 55A - Monasticism
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